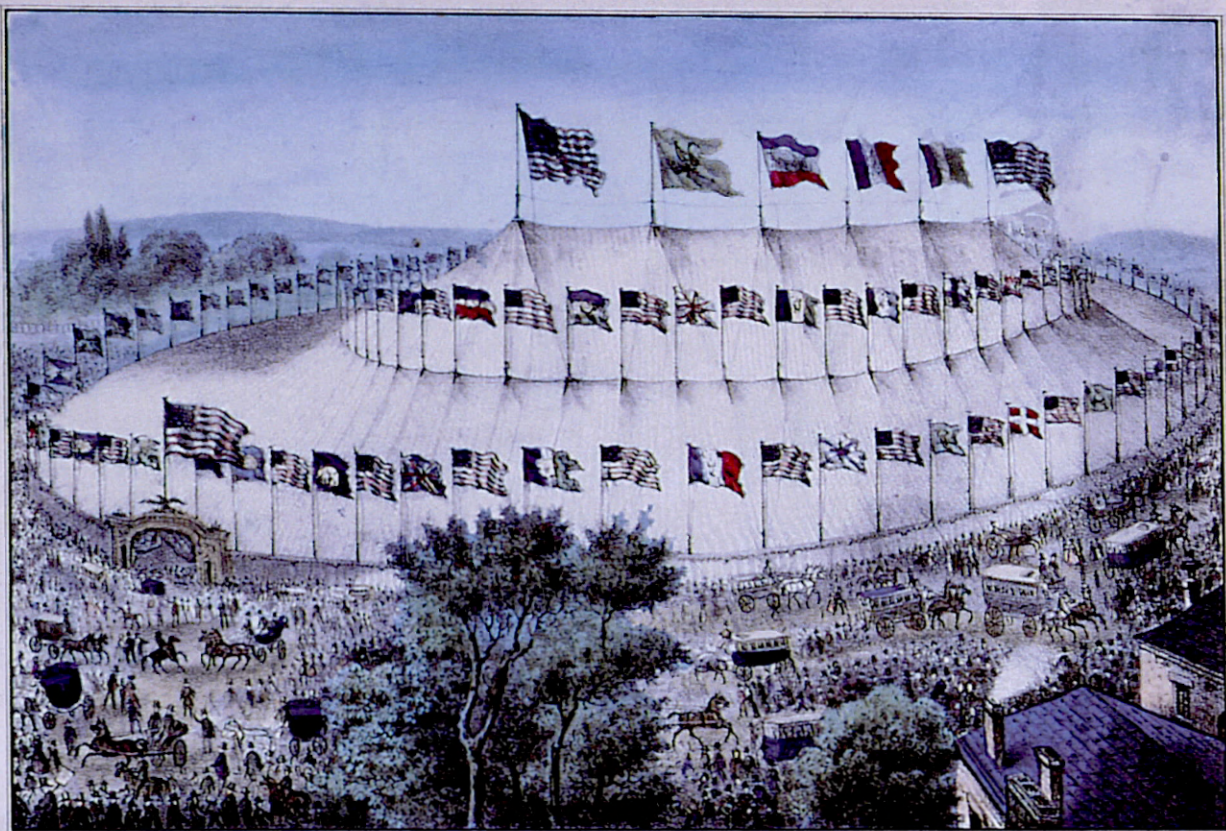


# Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF  
THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1991



EXTERIOR VIEW OF  
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# Bandwagon

## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Vol. 35, No. 6

November-December 1991

FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor-Bill Biggerstaff, Production and Graphics  
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### THIS MONTH'S COVER

The Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont, shared their collection of circus lithographs in 1989 during the CHS convention.

A selection of posters from the Shelburne collection appears elsewhere in this issue. The Van Amburgh & Co. c. 1860 lot scene lithograph on our cover is from Shelburne. Photograph by Ken Burris.

### NEW MEMBERS

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Baraboo, WI 53913

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Ken Geise 3742  
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Sunbury, PA 17801

### REINSTATED

Stanley Weber 2364  
2124 Central Park Ave.  
Yonkers, NY 10710

### 1992 CHS CONVENTION

The Circus Historical Society will be combining with the Joel E. Warner Top of the Circus Fans Association to bring a great circus event to the state of Michigan

August 20-22. It will be a chance to participate in the tradition of families and family reunions—the theme of this year's event. Three special circus families will be honored: Pat White, a Clare native and noted wild animal trainer for Carson & Barnes Circus; the Miller family of Carson & Barnes and the family of clowns.

CHS presentations on family circuses would be in order to coincide with the theme. Tentative plans are to have historical papers on Thursday, presentations on Friday with an evening banquet, a parade and performance of Carson & Barnes and the CHS auction in the evening on Saturday.

Clare, Michigan is located north of Lansing on Route 27. The headquarters for this year's convention will be the Doherty Motor Hotel. The Doherty was opened in 1924 and has excellent dining facilities. The convention rate will be \$55 for a double occupancy room, including breakfast on weekday mornings.

Those sending early reservations should include a check for one night's lodging. Doherty Motor Hotel's address is Clare, Michigan 48617, phone (800) 525-4115.

A film festival will be held for those arriving on August 19. A capacity crowd is expected, and part of it will be immortalized when an aerial photograph is taken of clowns surrounding the massive five ring Carson & Barnes big top.

### CHS ELECTION

The election of officers and directors of the Circus Historical Society takes place at the end of odd-numbered years for two year terms. A ballot for the 1991 election is enclosed with this issue. Only CHS members are entitled to vote. Your membership number must be shown on your ballot. *Bandwagon* subscribers are not entitled to vote. Please mark your ballot and return it to election commissioner Fred Pfening III whose address is on the back of the ballot. Individual ballots will be kept confidential and will be destroyed at an appropriate time after the election. Election results will be published in the January-February issue.

### SEASON'S REVIEW

There is still time to provide information for the review of the 1991 circus season that will appear in the January-February *Bandwagon*. Information is especially needed on smaller shows and those playing limited engagements during the year.

Send information to: Fred D. Pfening III, 2240 Tewksbury Road, Columbus, Ohio 43221.

### NEW ROSTER AVAILABLE

A new CHS membership roster is now available. All members and current addresses as of November 1991 are listed. Members can obtain a copy without charge by writing the editor.



## CORRECTIONS

In the article on Lillian Leitzel and Dolly Jacobs in the September-October *Bandwagon*, Leitzel's year of birth was erroneously given as 1882. The year 1892 is correct, and thanks to sharp-eyed reader Larry Kent for calling this to our attention. Tony Conway points out that Frank Shepherd (correct spelling) was not killed while doing his finishing trick, as mentioned in the same article.

The computer mangled a few lines in the article on Fred Pfening, Jr. in the same issue. To set the record straight the first lines of the paragraph of that article should have read: "After he was elected president of the 211 member Circus Historical Society in 1958, his main priority was to upgrade *Bandwagon*, and he supplied then editor Agnes King with material and ideas. By 1961, when the publishing schedule fell. . . ." The remainder of the paragraph, which starts at the top of the second column, is correct.

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr., publisher. (9-18-91)



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The names roll off the tongue as if they were a rock group—Mugivan, Bowers, and Ballard. Jerry Mugivan (1873-1930) and Bert Bowers (1874-1936) were two rough and tumble grifters who, after only a little more than a decade's apprenticeship in the business, started their own circus in 1904. By 1911, they operated two shows, and in 1917 consolidated them into one huge troupe. In 1919 they began their association with C. Edward Ballard (1874-1936), a wealthy hotel and casino operator from French Lick, Indiana. As an active investor in a major circus for the previous six years, he, too, was a showman of sorts. Theirs was a fortuitous alliance, and together they ascended to the pinnacle of the outdoor show business.

They formed the American Circus Corporation (ACC) on 25 May 1921, one of the great enterprises in field show history. Using Ballard's bankroll, and Mugivan's and Bowers' managerial genius, they roared through the decade operating three, and sometimes four, of the most efficient and profitable circuses ever to tour America. The titles are legendary: Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells-Floto, John Robinson. While no one of their shows was by itself a challenge to Ringling-Barnum, the industry's behemoth, taken together their outfits, usually thirty cars in size, were a formidable threat to the Big One's supremacy. Jerry Mugivan was called the circus king as often as John Ringling, and their winter quarters in Peru and West Baden, Indiana were as much metropolises on the circus map as Ringling's in Bridgeport, Connecticut and Sarasota, Florida.

Throughout the 1920s they sought op-

Business card of Jerry Mugivan, president of the American Circus Corporation. Pfening Archives.

# AL G. BARNES CIRCUS

## SEASON OF 1929 PART ONE

BY FRED D. PFENING III

portunities to expand their empire. In 1920 they purchased the Yankee Robinson and Sells-Floto circuses, and, if Murray Pennock, a Barnes show executive at the time, can be believed, unsuccessfully tried to buy the Al G. Barnes Circus in 1922.

During the winter of 1927-1928, the ACC made at least two, and probably three, unsuccessful attempts to buy other shows. In January 1928 negotiations were underway with Charles Sparks to acquire his twenty car Sparks Circus. They came to naught, but had they succeeded Mugivan planned to place Sylvester L. Cronin, an ACC stalwart, as manager. Late that same month, Mugivan, Bowers and Ballard traveled to Ponca City, Oklahoma where they discussed the acquisition of the 101 Ranch Wild West with the Miller brothers, the show's owners. After these talks failed, George L. Miller denied that his troupe had been on the market in *Billboard*, a sure sign that an imminent sale was hearsay in the industry. The third show they tried to purchase was Al G. Barnes. While no primary sources substantiate this attempted acquisition, Chang Reynolds, the leading Barnes show

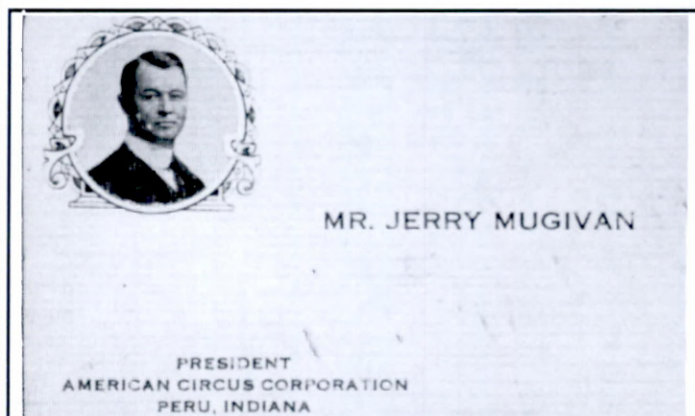
historian, reported that when the ACC bought the concern the next winter, the sale had been rumored for two years. Reynolds in all probability learned this from his extensive interviews with former Barnes personnel, and his assertion that earlier negotiations had taken place in all likelihood had a factual basis.

In the fall of 1928 Mugivan, Bowers and Ballard went on the prowl again. Rumors of impending purchases swirled through the industry as reports that the ACC was bargaining with the 101 Ranch Wild West, Sparks, and Fred Buchanan's Robbins Bros. Circus surfaced in the *Billboard*. In late October, the *Peru*

*Daily Tribune* interviewed someone at headquarters, probably Mugivan, who said the gossip was unfounded. Mugivan later wrote *White Tops* editor Karl K. Knecht that "*Billboard* prints lots of rumors without foundation." Mugivan's caveat to the contrary, *Billboard* got it right; the talks with the Ranch show and Sparks are well documented. The deliberations with Buchanan, however, have eluded any paper trail except for a brief comment by R. F. Schiller in a letter to Mugivan (quoted below), and the circumstantial evidence that Mugivan spent three days on Robbins Bros. early in the season. While the Barnes show was never specifically named as an acquisition target by *Billboard*, it was apparently common knowledge in the business that the circus was available.

The first to fall was Sparks. On 13 November 1928, Henry B. Gentry, acting surreptitiously for the ACC, signed an option to buy the circus from owners Charles Sparks, his son Clifton, and Nan Wise-

Business card of Bert Bowers, vice president of the American Circus Corporation. Pfening Archives.







Zack Miller of the 101 Ranch Wild West who cut a deal with Bowers in late 1928. Pfening Archives.

man, widow of founder John H. Sparks (nee Wiseman) and adoptive mother of Charles. At the 17 November 1928 ACC board meeting, Mugivan, on behalf of the corporation, was authorized to borrow \$250,000 from Ed Ballard to finance the purchase. The deal was concluded on 22 November for the sum of \$206,200 (the remaining \$43,800 was used to frame the show), something of a premium price for a twenty car show which reflected the drawing power and the reputation of the Sparks title. Five days later Gentry transferred his interest to Mugivan, which effectively brought the show into the fold.

Negotiations with the 101 Ranch had reached such a point by 4 September 1928 that Mugivan and Bowers had an inventory taken of the equipment when they visited the show at Fort Wayne, Indiana. On 17 November George L. Miller of the Ranch met in Chicago with Mugivan, Bowers, and Ballard, although he later told *Billboard* that the meeting had "no business significance," and that he and his surviving brother Zack had no intention of selling their troupe.

Miller's statement notwithstanding, in mid-December Bowers; J. B. Austin, an ACC agent; Sylvester Cronin, at the time an independent circus producer; and Theo Forstall, treasurer of the John Robinson Circus, set off for Oklahoma where intense negotiations took place. The ACC signed an option to buy the show on 14 December, and a bill of sale dated 17 December was drawn up. Zack Miller gave out a press statement on the 17th confirming the deal (picked up by *Variety*

among others), and announced his and his brother's retirement from the show business.

But then on the 20th the deal went south at the last moment. Sixteen years later Zack Miller recalled that after he had signed the bill of sale, he called in brother George for his signature. In reading over the contract, George found objectionable clauses and refused to sign, terminating the deal in a puff of smoke. *Billboard* carried the story in its 29 December issue: "The deal, according to reliable sources, called for a payment of \$275,000 which is said to have been satisfactory. It is contended, however, that the Millers understood the corporation would operate the 101 Ranch title for one season,

to use up a quantity of paper on the shelves, and then retire the title at the end of 1929, George L. Miller having vowed that the Ranch name never would be sold to the corporation outfit.

"After arrangements were supposed to have been concluded on this basis, the Millers are said to have learned that the syndicate planned to incorporate the 101 Ranch Show title for double the amount paid in acquiring the show, and to place stock on the market, which would have enabled the syndicate to retain a controlling interest and sell enough stock to give them the show for almost nothing.

"In a later statement to the press, George L. Miller said: 'We were retiring entirely from the show business in order to concentrate all our efforts on our other lines of business, but we refuse to allow the name Miller brothers on stock exploitations to bolster up the holdings of the American Circus Corporation.'"

Bowers didn't tell his version of the events in *Billboard* or any other publication, although the *Peru Daily Tribune* disclosed that the deal fell through because "the monetary consideration asked by Miller brothers was exorbitant." The unsigned 17 December bill of sale called for a \$185,000 purchase price, considerably less than the \$275,000 *Billboard* reported. It further granted the ACC exclusive use of the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Real Wild West title in the United States, Canada, and Mexico with the stipulation that it never be used on any show of less than twenty cars, nor in any connection with a concert or after show of any other circus or wild west. The Millers also insisted that they have first refusal for twenty years should the ACC desire to sell the equipment or title, with the two excep-



George Miller, who scuttled the deal to sell the 101 Ranch show. Pfening Archives.

tions that the ACC could sell the property "as a part of, or in connection with other show property," and "as a unit to a corporation to be organized as an operating company and to be controlled by Circus City Zoological Garden[s]." The contract permitted the Millers to use the 101 Ranch Wild West title only for "a rodeo, round-up and terrapin derby performance on the 101 Ranch in Kay County, Oklahoma."

Bowers wrote Mugivan on 23 December after leaving Oklahoma that they could still buy the show "if you will not incorporate and use the name 'Miller Brothers.' But they will give you the privilege to use the wording 'Miller Brothers' on printed matter, etc. They also want to hold an option, which is very binding, to keep you from disposing of same—not show property, but the title."

Clearly, the terms had changed since the bill of sale was drafted, apparently the result of George Miller's objections. Bowers mentioned nothing about being able to use the title only for the 1929 season as Miller had told the press. He did confirm, however, the concerns Miller expressed about incorporating the title. From the letter, it is apparent Mugivan surmised that Frank A. Gavin, a former ACC concessionaire who was privilege boss on Ranch in 1928, may have torpedoed the deal by tipping the Millers off on the ACC's intention to incorporate the title as a first step toward taking the Ranch public. Bowers assured his partner that "Gavin had nothing to do with knocking the deal, or could not have knocked it."



"They also want," Bowers continued, "the privilege of putting on Rodeos anywhere, anytime or any place without restriction," which was another change from the very limited usage permitted in the 17 December document. One imagines the ACC would object to the possibility of a rodeo, the first cousin of a wild west show, touring the country with a nearly identical title in competition with their own troupe.

Bowers summed up the situation: "The property itself is in fine condition, but there is no doubt that you can buy it in a year from now for lots less money than you can now. I offered \$130,000.00 for it without the title, but they do not need the money. All their bills are paid, and they handle plenty of money.

"[R. M.] Harvey is going to be their agent, he is very friendly to us, and we can get route of the show without any trouble. They are not going to play any towns (with a few exceptions) that they played last year.

"We saw the books—the receipts have the drawing power of an ordinary 30 car show. . . .

"So I think the best thing to do is let them slide by another year." Thus ended the ACC's efforts to buy the 101 Ranch Wild West.

The most tantalizing aspects of the entire deal were Miller's statement that the ACC planned to become a publicly traded concern, and his charge that it intended to inflate the value of the company in what he characterized as a "stock exploitation." The latter was a scheme, commonly known as "watering stock," in which the financial statement of a corporation was misrepresented, making the earnings potential and therefore the price of the stock higher than in actuality. A common scenario was to sell less than 50% of the stock at an inflated price, leaving the original owners in control but far richer from the sale of stock than if it had been sold at a fair market value. Miller said it a bit differently: the ACC wanted to "retain a controlling interest and sell enough stock to give them the show for almost nothing."

Such activity effectively ended with the passage of the Securities Act of 1933 which required a full and accurate disclosure of the financial information of all companies making initial stock offerings with the company directors civilly and criminally liable for misrepresentation.

Was the American Circus Corporation

about to make an initial stock offering to become a public company, similar to Barnum and Bailey Ltd. thirty years earlier, or Ringling-Barnum forty years later?<sup>1</sup> While no memoirs or secondary accounts have hinted that a public offering was contemplated, the evidence strongly suggests that such was the case.

The facts are these. On 21 November 1928 Circus City Zoological Gardens, Inc. (CCZG) was organized under Indiana law with an authorized capital stock issue of 1000 shares. Two days later, CCZG adopted a resolution at its stockholders meeting to buy the American Circus Corporation. On 28 November the ACC board of directors accepted the offer with the stock to be transferred on 1 January 1929. On that day the 16,698 outstanding shares of stock in the ACC were delivered to the CCZG. To execute the purchase, the 1000 shares of CCZG stock were issued to the ACC stockholders in the same proportion as their respective holdings of ACC stock. Ballard held 30.6% of the stock; Mugivan, 15.3% in his own name and was trustee for another 15.3%; Bowers, 15.3% in his own name and was trustee for another 15.3%; Zack Terrell, Sells-Floto manager, 5.2%; and C. D. Odom, better known as Dan Odom, Hagenbeck-Wallace manager, 2.8%. Essentially, the five stockholders of CCZG bought the ACC from themselves.

On 7 January 1929, Mugivan advised C. M. Ewing, a banker with the City Trust Co. of Indianapolis who was in New York at the time, that he and his partners had purchased the Barnes show, stating that it was a "very good acquisition as it gives us a show on the west coast and we can thus cover the territory exceptionally well." He referred to unspecified negotiations with the key passage reading, "As the deal stands, we will have to have our original price of \$150 per share, plus \$500,000.00 for the two shows we have just ac-

Fancy four page American Circus Corporation letterhead of the mid 1920s. Pfening Archives.

quired. . . . I trust that you will have a favorable answer for us soon. . . ."

The letter clearly indicates CCZG was for sale. How many shares were involved is unknown, although it would have to have been more than the 1000 outstanding shares of capital stock in CCZG, the total price of which at \$150 per share would have been \$150,000, far too low a price for three profitable circuses that coined \$290,047.59 in net profits the previous season, and a first class winter quarters. The speculation that Ewing was negotiating with a New York investment banking firm seems credible, although no hard evidence exists. One would think if Mugivan were dealing with private investors, or certainly with another showman, he would have dealt direct.<sup>2</sup>

On 28 January Ballard sent Ewing, by then back in Indianapolis, an inventory of animals at the Peru winter quarters with comments on changes from a similar list from the year before. The letter concluded with the enigmatic comment, "I am taking up the matter of the option with Mr. Mugivan, Bowers, Terrell and Odom and will get it straightened out and sent to you as soon as possible. . . ." Since the parties involved were the sole stockholders in CCZG, the option was almost certainly connected in some manner with the impending sale of the shows. The temptation to interpret Ballard's remark as proof that an underwriter was about to make an offer must remain speculative as further detail is lacking.

Likewise, Ewing's mid-February 1929 inquiry into the earnings of the Barnes and Sparks shows over the past five years is suggestive of the kind of information investment bankers would need when underwriting an initial stock offering. On 20 February Mugivan wrote him back with the Barnes figures and said he expected similar data from Charles Sparks soon.

The exchanges with Ewing, although frustratingly sparse in particulars and giving no clue with whom he was negotiating, make a strong case that CCZG was for sale.

The last bit of evidence regarding this episode came from the 17 April 1929 *Variety* under the headline "Am. Circus Corp. Plans Public Stock Issue?" "It is reported," the paper noted, "that the American Circus Corp. will shortly put out a stock issue on the market, to be listed on either the Chicago or New York exchange. . . . Under-





stood the corporation is now in the hands of lawyers and bankers for a check up." Mugivan, true to form, quickly denied the report in the April *White Tops*.

While the case for taking CCZG public is tenuous, support for the contention that there was intent to defraud the new stockholders is non-existent. Taking George Miller's "stock exploitation" charge as a starting point, the writer initially hypothesized that Mugivan, Bowers, and Ballard sold all the assets and liabilities of the ACC to CCZG as a means of artificially inflating the value of the circuses they controlled, therefore increasing asking price of the stock. He even thought he had a "smoking gun," to use Nixon-era terminology, in the form of a remarkable document prepared in 1941 for John F. Reddy, a Ringling-Barnum executive, which contained 64 pages of financial data on the Ringling-Barnum show, the American Circus Corporation, Circus City Zoological Gardens, and the various circuses they controlled.

Sure he was onto something, the author consulted Brian Russell, a Columbus, Ohio CPA with an interest in accounting history, who thoroughly examined the records. Russell found no evidence of financial manipulation—nothing unusual—in the 1 January 1929 CCZG opening statement, but uncovered many unexplained entries in the ACC financial records from 1921 to 1928. When asked why Mugivan and his partners would go to the trouble of creating a new corporation, Russell suggested that if, indeed, they planned to become a public company, they would have had a difficult time explaining to bankers and underwriters why the ACC's accounting was so murky, and why, in some cases, what appear to be unrealistic values were carried on the books.

It was his opinion that the financial community would have had more confidence in underwriting the stock of a company whose balance sheet mirrored the real value of the concern such as CCZG's, rather than one full of questionable entries such as the ACC's. Russell explained that in an initial public stock offering, often only a portion of the company's total market value is based on the value reflected in its balance sheet. A significant part of the value is often based on the historical and projected earnings capability of the company. Any adjustments to the balance sheet, such as writing down unrealistic carrying values of assets, would have a negative impact on the company's earnings. If these adjustments were made after a public stock offering



Al G. Barnes, the great western showman. Pfening Archives.

they might decrease the market value of the stock substantially. While Russell's analysis disclosed no evidence that CCZG stock was about to be sold to the public, and did not eliminate other reasons for transferring the Peru shows from the ACC to CCZG, his interpretation, if nothing else, provides a possible explanation for the creation of CCZG. It also would seem to rule out any conspiracy to deceive investors.

No stock was ever sold to the public as the ACC's restructuring became irrelevant on 6 September 1929 when John Ringling bought CCZG, the ACC, five circuses, a winter quarters, and a boat load of trouble. That Mugivan, Bowers, and Ballard were seriously considering selling their circus holdings or at least a percentage of them to parties other than Ringling before the fateful events of late summer 1929 is of more than passing interest as it casts new light on the biggest deal in American circus history.

After failing in Oklahoma, Bowers and his lieutenants boarded a California-bound train to acquire the Al G. Barnes Circus. In the late 1920s Al G. Barnes, the affable, high-living prince of western showmen, found himself squeezed from all sides. While the circus netted between \$900,000 and a cool million between 1924 and 1928, the profits went into settling a tax claim, alimony payments, lawsuits, and real estate in California and Nevada, some of which went sour. In 1927 he took a big hit when he paid the Internal Revenue Service \$175,000 in back taxes and a \$5000 fine for unreported income from his circus from 1917 to 1919. In February

1927, he purchased 300 acres near Baldwin Park, California, taking on a sizable mortgage. While a portion of the property was used as the show's winter quarters beginning that fall, he also intended to subdivide the land, forming the Barnes Realty Company to do so.

Starting the 1928 tour with a diminished bankroll and a heavy personal nut, he needed a winning year to turn his fortunes around. He didn't get it, nor did many showmen in a season characterized by *Variety* as "a near bust." The Barnes campaign, after a promising start, became a bloodbath in the second half as opposition with other shows ate into receipts.

On 28 September H. T. Robinson, who held the mortgage on the Baldwin Park property, loaned the circus, or more correctly its parent company, United Investment and Amusement Company, \$25,000 at 7% annual interest with the entire amount due 28 May 1929. Whether Barnes used the money as operating capital for the show, or as a means of maintaining the mortgage on the Baldwin Park land can not be ascertained. In any case, the once mighty Al G. Barnes Circus crawled into quarters in early October after its earliest closing ever with some show personnel and vendors unpaid. During the last weeks of the season, the show was bankrolled by an advance payment from a motion picture company for the use of the quarters for a silent movie, and a loan from Herman Klinkhart, the midget magnate, whose troupe of diminutive performers had been a Barnes feature for years. Barnes' ex-wife was carping about alimony payments, and the great man himself was experiencing health problems. He had considered selling his circus in past years; now, boxed in financially, he had little choice if he wanted to avoid seeing the work of almost a quarter century end at a sheriff's sale.

Who approached whom and when the initial contact took place has been obscured by the sands of history. What is known is that shortly before 20 November Mugivan offered Barnes \$150,000 for the show, an indication that preliminary negotiations had taken place earlier. By 19 or 20 November, Mugivan learned that Barnes had another buyer lined up, and telegraphed his old friend R. F. Schiller, the assistant manager of Robbins Bros. Circus, who was then wintering in near-by Venice: "Rumor here Barnes sold his show. Advise if correct." After visiting Barnes at the quarters, Schiller wired back on the 20th that he hadn't. He followed up with a letter, in mangled prose and in an almost in-



decipherable hand, advising Mugivan that while the equipment was in poor condition he should buy the show, suggesting that he sell what equipment he could and attach the title to one of the existing ACC circuses to exploit the drawing power of the Barnes name in the West.

According to Schiller, Barnes was "damn hard up. He [is] tied up in real estate, in fact he takes to it better than [the] show and wants to sell out as I could read between [the] lines. He asks \$200,000.00. He said he got offer from you [for] \$150,000.00. Also said he had other [offer]. I told him not to turn any bids down, in fact I talk[ed] to him as [if] it was immaterial to you whether you got show or not, in fact you [would] rather get our show [Robbins Bros.]. . . . He came down and could see Barnes now [had] only one place to sell and that you. . . . You or Bert [Bowers] come out and I do all I can." Schiller also offered to loan Mugivan money for the purchase.

Mugivan wrote Schiller back on 24 November, reiterating his offer of \$150,000, "and if you can purchase it at that figure we might be able to give you a good place with it."

A flurry of telegrams followed, starting with Schiller's on 28 November after he had met with Barnes: "Barnes prefers you take show as offered. Otherwise sold to other parties. Half down."

Mugivan, 29 November: "Get Barnes lowest cash price for immediate deal."

Schiller, 30 November: "Barnes wire you price. Claims he got it sold but not closed. . . ."

Mugivan, 30 November or 1 December: "Hold until I talk to Barnes."

Talk to him he did, although no record of their dealings survive. Things were cooking, however, as the 12 December *Variety* reported that it was "generally said," (no doubt by "reliable sources") that the ACC had control of the Barnes show. At the 14 December ACC board meeting,

Bowers was authorized to buy the circus on behalf of the corporation which borrowed \$250,000 from Ballard on a one year note at 6% interest. The next day Ballard cabled Mugivan from Paris: "Mailing check for two hundred fifty thousand. If Barnes has not sold any part of his property and is intact which would include everything he used on road past season, also all properties in winter quarters at the price you mentioned should be good buy." This was the second time in a month Ballard had provided the financing for the ACC's expansion.

Schiller's role in the Barnes acquisition apparently ended in early December, and he returned to Robbins Bros. the next spring. On 19 January 1929, he was paid \$200 for his trouble out of the Barnes treasury.

This was the situation when Bowers arrived at the Barnes winter quarters on the morning of 23 December. He wrote back to Mugivan that evening: "The property is in no way near the same condition as the Ranch property. He [Barnes] has one wood flat car, steelized, one wood stock car, and the baggage car that has been converted into a sleeping car for the bosses, for which purpose it is not very good, although it is a steel underframe car.

"The Advance Car is not as good as I expected. But he has a lot of animals, and from a winning standpoint, I think it is a better buy than the Ranch. Some of the animals are a little old, but there are plenty of them. The Ring Stock is in wonderful condition.

"I will not do any business with Barnes before Wednesday or Thursday [the 26th and 27th] as there is a lot of litigation to go through with but if he can clear the title up, I will do business at that time."

On 28 December, the board of directors of the United Investment and Amusement Company, the parent company, au-

Barnes circus winter quarters at Baldwin Park, California, c. 1929. Pfening Archives.

thorized to sell the Barnes circus for \$150,000 "to Bert Bowers or to any one else desiring to purchase the same." Barnes and Joseph Smith, the secretary of United Investment, after receiving \$100, signed an option to sell the show to Bowers for the authorized amount on 5 January 1929.

At the same meeting Barnes and Smith were authorized to borrow \$20,000, payable on 20 January 1929 without interest, from John O. Talbott, who took a chattel mortgage on the circus. The chattel acknowledged that United Investment had no other liens or claims against it except the 28 September chattel executed by H. T. Robinson.

Talbott was acting on Bowers' behalf, and his \$20,000 loan was a down payment on the show. Bowers had hoped to close the deal on 26 December, but straightening out Barnes' debts had prolonged the process. He wrote Mugivan on 31 December that "I have an option, also a chattel for \$20,000.00 and the deal is bound to go through."

Talbott's role in the transaction is intriguing. He had known Mugivan and Bowers since 1893 when all three were on Joe B. McMahon's Sanger and Lent Circus. (Could McMahon have dreamed what diamonds in the rough he employed on his traveling casino?) As the legal adjuster for Sells and Gray in 1900, Talbott brought Mugivan back into the circus business as his assistant, and in 1902 the two had the privileges and pie car on Great Wallace. In 1907 they were both minority owners in the newly formed Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. In 1913 Talbott bought back into Hagenbeck-Wallace, and appears to have ended his active participation in the circus business when he sold his interest in mid-season 1914.

While he never made the really big-time in the outdoor show business, he became hugely wealthy investing in land, oil, minerals, and hotels. Born in Indiana, he established himself in Denver in 1886, and moved to Los Angeles in 1926 where





he died in 1939 at the age of seventy-eight. He was best known as one of a group of "sportsmen," to use the phrase of the day, who operated a string of race tracks in Denver, Cheyenne, Reno, and Los Angeles. Among the partners he brought into deals were Mugivan and Bowers who invested in Denver real estate with him in the 1920s. He also assisted them and their circuses in minor-- and in the case of the Barnes sale--major ways.

A total of eighteen checks were written to consummate the Barnes purchase, all of them signed by Talbott. On 29 December he wrote one for \$20,000 which was the loan to United Investment for which he took a chattel; the other was for \$100 to Bowers which was used as payment for the option Barnes agreed to the day before. Some pieces of this puzzle are obviously missing as Talbott's involvement seems superfluous since the ACC had the cash in hand from Ballard two weeks before. In any event, Talbott's role is not critical to understanding the transaction, and this fragmentary account of the old warrior's last hurrah in the circus business must remain enigmatic. When Talbott released United Investment from his chattel on 12 January 1929, the curtain fell on this hard scrabble showman who hit it big in the real world.

On Saturday, 5 January 1929 the United Investment and Amusement Co. sold the Al G. Barnes Circus to Bert Bowers for \$150,000. Included were all the physical properties used on the show in 1928 and everything in winter quarters including all supplies and feed then on hand. The trade names Al G. Barnes Circus and Al G. Barnes Big Four Ring Wild Animal Circus were also part of the deal, but only for use in the circus business, and Bowers had the right to use Barnes' picture or likeness in advertising. Barnes himself agreed to stay out of the circus or menagerie business for five years, although he could engage in a "minstrel show or other shows, theatrical performance or zoo." United Investment was given access to the pre-1929 books and records for one year.

United Investment was responsible for all advertising materials received before 5 January. Bowers was to pay for all advertising on order from Erie Lithograph and Standard Printing. Any taxes due were to be paid by Bowers out of the purchase price, and United Investment stated there were no liens on the property, but if any were instituted Bowers was held harmless of any loss suffered.

Bowers received free use of the winter quarters in Baldwin Park until the opening of the 1929 season. The quarters land and buildings were not included in the



Baggage wagons being refurbished at the Barnes winter quarters, probably early 1929. Pfening Archives.

sale as they were owned by the Barnes Realty Company.

After Barnes signed the bill of sale, Talbott wrote sixteen checks totaling \$129,900, the remaining \$20,100 being Talbott's loan to United Investment, and Bowers' option. Two checks totaling \$2447.48 went to Smith and Breslin, Barnes' attorneys. Downie Bros., a Los Angeles tent supplier, received one for \$1250.34. The Klinkhart midget troupe got one for \$1225 and their manager Herman Klinkhart, one for \$9210 which was the amount he loaned Barnes to move the show in the waning days of the 1928 season. Charles C. Cook, 1928 Barnes manager, received \$400; and John T. Backman, the equestrian director, and his wife, \$65, probably for salary due in both cases. Erie Lithograph was doubtless overjoyed when one was issued in its name for \$16,836.52. Blanchard Press, which appears to have printed the date sheets, received \$1649.65. H. T. Robinson, who held mortgages on the show and the winter quarters property, received two checks for \$3794.67 and \$24,566.64, the latter satisfying his 28 September 1928 loan to United Investment. Two individuals who can not be identified were issued checks: Joseph White for \$1054.31, and John D. Friesen for \$284.02. Likewise two unknown companies, most likely vendors, received money: M. H. Lewis and Company, \$2605.21, and MacLeon-McFarlane & Co., \$361.34.

Of the sixteen checks written that day only one was made out to United Investment and Amusement Co. It was for \$64,149.82, which, along with the \$20,000 received on 29 December, represented United Investment's remaining equity. Theo Forstall, who was on the scene, recalled years later that Barnes personally received only \$40,000 out of the sale. The

old showman put on a brave face, telling the press he got \$1,000,000 for his circus. He spent the next few months propping up his real estate investments, making himself a nuisance around winter quarters, and appearing in court. In mid-January he was socked for \$15,000 in a personal injury case brought against him by a movie extra who was injured after being thrown from one his elephants during filming at the quarters, and later in the year finally resolved a suit brought by his second ex-wife. In May he joined the Christy Bros. Circus as a "manager and advisor" as Christy battled it out with the Barnes show up the Pacific Coast. Barnes told *Variety* that he had joined Christy "to smooth out the wrinkles and get it going smoothly, and not to use his intimate knowledge of the territory against the people who bought him out," presumably a sop to the non-compete clause in his contract with Bowers. Barnes died on 25 July 1931, leaving an estate valued at only \$5000.

After Bowers pocketed the bill of sale, he went to Western Union where he wired Mugivan the news: "Closed deal all okey [sic]." On 10 January the Al G. Barnes Amusement Company filed incorporation papers with the Indiana Secretary of State. The incorporators and directors were Robert DeLochte, Sells-Floto treasurer; Jess Adkins, Floto assistant manager; and Walter Rairden, Floto secretary. One thousand shares of capital stock were issued of which 997 were owned by Circus City Zoological Gardens, and one each by the incorporators. On 12 January their single share certificates were cancelled and reissued to Mugivan, Bowers, and Perry McCart who was Ballard's lawyer. They immediately voted to buy the Barnes Circus, and authorized the sale of all the capital stock to CCZG for \$250,000. On 15 January Bowers closed the circle when he sold the Barnes show, which he bought as an individual, to the Barnes Amusement Com-



pany for a dollar. That day the Barnes show officially became the fifth and last circus to come under the rubric of CCZG.

The ACC had incorporated Sells-Floto, John Robinson and Hagenbeck-Wallace in a similar fashion on 30 November 1928, and did the same with Sparks on 4 December. While it was a prudent business practice to incorporate the newly acquired Sparks and Barnes shows to limit liability, the incorporation of the three other circuses, whose stock had been wholly owned by the ACC since its inception, would indicate that this legal maneuvering was part of the effort to tidy up the books that occurred when CCZG was formed. All three had been incorporated years before; Sells-Floto in Colorado in 1921, and both John Robinson and Hagenbeck-Wallace in Ohio in 1919.

The first mention in the press of the sale was the legal notice inserted in the Los Angeles *Daily Journal* on 29 December. On 9 January the news got back to Peru when the *Daily Tribune* carried a short article in which Mugivan stated that the purchase gave the ACC a foothold in the West, and that reports that the Barnes show would move to Peru were incorrect. In the trade press, *Variety*, whose circus coverage ebbed and flowed, never reported the story. *Billboard*, always in the Ringling camp and biased against the ACC, carried an editorial railing against mergers and consolidations in the circus business on 5 January, and approvingly reprinted similar sentiments from Kansas City and Indianapolis papers. The quotation from the Kansas City *Star* left no doubt where *Billboard* was directing its criticism: "We grow sick in contemplation of what it means, this taking the heart out of our old favorite circuses and directing them from Peru, Indiana. Some way or other we never will be able again to enjoy

New wheels being readied for painting at Baldwin Park winter quarters, probably in early 1929. Pfening Archives.

them as we once did, for instead of picturing the ringmaster as inspiring head of the show, we will think of him as the mayor or the city marshal of Peru, Ind." In its next issue the sale story was buried in the "Under the Marquee" column, and the following week stated that while newspaper reports put the sale price at \$1,000,000, the "inside information" was that the actual price was \$350,000.

The inventory attached to the bill of sale offers a detailed look at the physical properties of the Barnes show. Abridged somewhat, it was as follows:

- 1 Performing hippopotamus
- 6 Performing sea lions
- 3 Performing black bears
- 2 Performing polar bears
- 1 Performing grizzly bear
- 20 Performing tigers
- 19 Performing lions
- 1 Performing leopard
- 1 Performing hybrid
- 8 Hyenas
- 2 Boxing kangaroos
- 4 Rhesus monkeys
- 2 Java monkeys
- 1 White face ringtail monkey
- 1 Raccoon
- 1 Anteater
- 1 Water buffalo
- 2 Sacred oxen
- 1 American buffalo
- 1 Yak
- 1 Female elk
- 10 Elephants
- 9 Performing camels
- 11 Crown zebras
- 1 Zebra hybrid
- 16 Dogs
- 41 Birds
- 30 Ring stock horses
- 9 Shetland ponies "of which 3 are Liputians"
- 5 Small Mules, "Highly educated"
- 74 Baggage horses
- 110 Sets Work harness
- 115 Sets Halters
- 1 Tool box and contents
- 2 Garage wagons, un-numbered

- 1 Canvas wagon, #82
- 1 Horse tent wagon, #79
- 1 Stake and chain wagon, #11
- 1 Ring curb wagon, #48
- 1 Jack wagon, #81
- 1 Pole wagon, #92
- 1 Stringer wagon, #40
- 1 Property wagon, #76
- 1 Grandstand plank wagon, #102
- 1 Property wagon, #73
- 1 Chair wagon, #47
- 1 Grandstand plank wagon, #101
- 1 Blue plank wagon, #100
- 1 Grandstand chair wagon, #46
- 1 Side show wagon, #72
- 1 Blue plank wagon, #91
- 1 Wardrobe wagon, #180
- 1 Candy wagon, #184
- 1 Property wagon, #49
- 1 Menagerie wagon, #45
- 1 Arena wagon, #99
- 1 Wardrobe wagon, #180, [either double counted, mis-identified, double numbered, or mis-numbered as same appears above]
- 1 Big top rigging wagon, #83
- 1 Side show trunk wagon, #183
- 1 Elephant trappings wagon, #181
- 1 Cook house wagon, #1
- 1 Cook house wagon, #2
- 1 Red office wagon, un-numbered
- 1 Stake driver, #10
- 1 Water wagon (round), #20
- 1 Water wagon (square), #21
- 1 Band wagon, #185
- 1 Light plant wagon, #109
- 1 Light plant wagon, #110
- 1 Inside light wagon, #10
- 1 Steam calliope, #5
- 1 Electric calliope, un-numbered
- 1 Ox cart, un-numbered
- 1 Bear cart, un-numbered
- 1 Beauty car, un-numbered
- 1 Hippo cart, un-numbered
- 1 Pocahontas carriage, un-numbered
- 1 Joe Martin cage, #88
- 10 Cages, #117, #126, #121, #141, #106, #105, #178, #107 or #197, #118, and #120
- 1 Cage (no wheels), #119
- 1 Shifting cage, #103
- 1 Bear den cage, #179
- 1 Cage (for birds), #114
- 1 Seal den, #66
- 1 Hippo den, #190
- 1 Dog wagon, #86
- 1 Trunk wagon, #182
- 1 Lot Elephant and animal props and trappings including such items as elephant halters, howdahs, hippo harness, elephants blankets, and zebra pads
- 1 Lot Ring stock trappings including such items as saddles, bridles, harness, howdahs, and martingales
- 1 Lot Miscellaneous trappings and equipment including such items as medicine chest, monkey pads, flag pole sockets, and a trunk full of cuts from the spec Alice in Animaland





1 Lot Tools and supplies, including 275 wooden stakes, 300 iron stakes, and the awning for the stake and chain wagon  
 16 Lengths for a complete grandstand  
 1750 Chairs for grandstand  
 27 Lengths for Blues complete  
 11 Lengths for Reserves complete, Star-backs  
 1 Cook house tent  
 2 Private tops  
 1 Private toilet  
 1 Blacksmith shop with tools complete  
 4 Cooking ranges  
 1 Lot Complete outfit of cooking and eating utensils, jacks and seats for 1000 people  
 14 Steel flat cars  
 8 Pullman sleepers complete with bedding  
 8 Steel stock cars  
 4 Sets Runs for flat cars, all equipped with chocks, hardwood decking, ropes, blocks, cables and jacks, torches, bars and tools  
 1 Old big top, 150 ft. round top with three 50 ft. middles  
 4 Old center poles for above  
 1 Old front door marquee  
 1 Big top, 160 ft. round with three 50 ft. middles, center poles, side poles, stakes, side wall, 225 wooden stakes, ropes and block  
 1 Menagerie tent, 80 ft. round with five 40 ft. middles, center poles, side poles, stakes, side wall, stakes, ropes and block  
 1 Side show tent, 60 ft. round with two 39 ft. middles, center poles, quarters poles, side poles, stakes, side wall, banner poles for 14 banners complete with stakes, ropes and blocks  
 1 Marquee for front door  
 1 Dressing room tent, 140 ft. by 32 ft.  
 1 Pad room tent, 140 ft. by 32 ft.  
 2 Horse tents, 70 ft. by 32 ft.  
 1 Wardrobe tent, 24 ft. by 18 ft.  
 1 Hamburger tent, 18 ft. by 12 ft.  
 1 Stake and chain tent, 12 ft. by 12 ft.  
 1 Workingmens' toilet tent 14 ft. by 37 ft.  
 2 Public toilets with movable lumber  
 2 Candy stand tops  
 1 Lot Wardrobe  
 1 Lot Properties including swinging ladders, platforms, elephant tubs, sections of the arena for cat acts, pedestals, rhinestone machine, and Chinese gongs  
 2 Generators, 20 kw  
 1 Generator, 25 kw  
 1 Generator, 6 kw  
 1 750 watt Delco light train plant  
 1 Lot Electrical equipment including cable, dimmers, and lamps  
 1 Five ton Hall tractor  
 1 Three ton Mack truck  
 Because time was short, Bowers had set to work framing the show even before he had closed with Barnes. On 24 December he wrote Mugivan about the

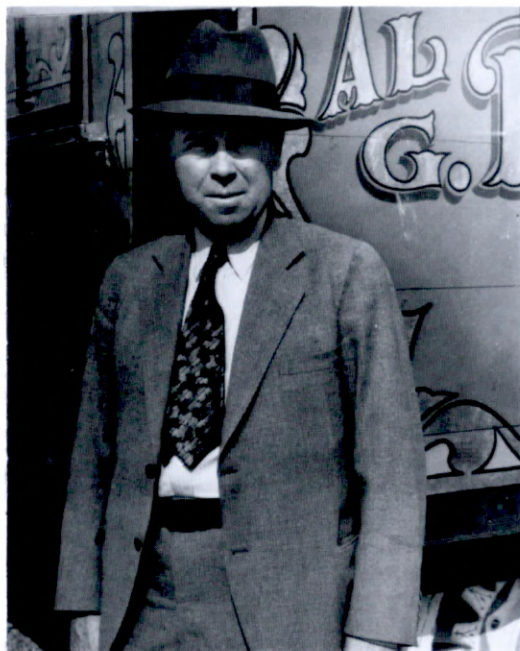
work that had to be done immediately after they took possession. "You know," Bowers wrote, "they have never had any privilege car with this show to amount to anything. They have one short car that was a privilege car. Nobody slept in it—it was all used for privilege car. I was going to have them divide it and make two cars out of it, as it sets in the center of the train. There are no shelves and no counter in it, just a blank car." He suggested Mugivan persuade W. E. Baney, who ran the privilege car on John Robinson in 1928, to take the position. Bowers had learned that day that Baney had refused to return to the Robinson show because of a beef with the manager.

Another matter needing immediate attention was the side show. "There is no side show manager and no people engaged for the side show," he noted. "There is no suitable side show manager out here that I know of, and as the time is short we have to have a side show manager so that as soon as he engages performers he can wire to Chicago and have banners painted. If not, they will have no banner front."

A third priority was the cook house which needed a new tent, a steam wagon and ranges. A cook house steward had to be signed, and Bowers reported he had tried unsuccessfully to locate George Tipton to fill the position, and asked Mugivan to send him the address if he had it.

He also requested the address of Eddie Delavan to engage him as auditor for the show if Delavan wasn't going to Hagenbeck-Wallace. He suggested Frank J. Frink, who had recently left the 101

Sylvester L. Cronin, Barnes circus manager, 1929. Pfening Archives.



Ranch show, be signed as general agent, and quickly sent west to consult with J. B. Austin in laying out the route. He asked for a copy of the ACC regulations for managers regarding ticket sellers, hiring personnel, and other matters, so he could turn them over to the road manager. In a final note, Bowers said he had already signed Charles C. Cook, the Barnes show manager in 1928, as assistant manager to provide continuity. "He will be OK," he concluded.

On 31 December he wrote Mugivan again: "These wagons are in awful shape, and as the time is very short, I am going out there today and measure some wheels and send to St. Marys for some, as we cannot buy any wheels out here. Am also going to have the big top spread, but it has been used three years and they say it is in bad shape.

"We will have to build a paint shop," he continued, "but Barnes will furnish the lumber free, as this thing sets out in an open lot. But they will get it whipped in shape, but there are many things to buy. There is not a cash register with the show. But we will put it out as cheap as possible."

On 4 January Mugivan wrote back that he had just returned from Macon, Georgia where he was framing the Sparks Circus; "everything is all okay there and looks good." He also advised Bowers to write Walter L. Wilson of Baker-Lockwood in Kansas City about a new big top.

Sylvester L. Cronin, known everywhere as Buster, quickly assumed the duties of Barnes manager. Born in 1879, he started in the business around the turn of the century on the Walter L. Main Circus. Seasons on Great Wallace, John Robinson, Sells-Floto and Norris and Rowe followed. Like most circus executives, he worked his way through the ranks, starting as a pony punk, and later as cook house waiter, and ticket seller. Eventually he became an ace banner solicitor, selling advertising banners in the tents to local merchants. Because the banner man usually worked on commission, a hustler such as Cronin could make good money. He held this position on Howes Great London from 1911 to 1916, and on John Robinson from 1917 until 1925, both Mugivan and Bowers shows. In 1926 he struck out on his own by forming the Cronin Amusement Corporation. Headquartered in Detroit, it produced rodeos, wild west shows and circuses for fraternal and benevolent groups. Aware of Cronin's experience and abilities from their long association, Bowers offered him the Barnes position at \$10,000 per year.

In those wondrous days before cheap and reliable long distance phone



service, computer modems, and fax machines, the world communicated over distances by letter and telegram. Mugivan and Bowers ruled their domain in this manner, each day receiving status reports from their managers, and financial statements from their treasurers. Fortunately, most of Cronin's letters back to Peru (at least through mid-July), and all of treasurer Theo Forstall's statements have survived. Together they provide an intimate record of the show, unparalleled for any other circus of the period.

The two page accounting statement was filled out daily, regardless of the level of financial activity, both in winter quarters and on the road. Developed and refined over a number of years, the same form was utilized by all five ACC circuses in 1929. The amount of data it generated was staggering. The city, state, date, weather, and opposition were entered at the top of the sheet. The receipts column tabulated every type of ticket sold at both ticket wagons, the advance sale, and the inside reserve sale for each performance. The number of tickets sold was extended by the per ticket price to arrive at the dollar amount taken in at every source for every show. After the side show (called "annex" in the ledger) and concert income were figured in the same manner, all the ticket money was added together under

et sales to determine the total receipts for the day. Below that line was the balance brought forward, which was the ending figure from the previous day. It was added to the current day's receipts. The total expenditures for the day were listed on the next line. The new ending balance, the last entry, was achieved by adding together the balance brought forward and the day's receipts, then subtracting the day's expenses. Under normal circumstances this figure would reflect the difference between the receipts and expenses and therefore the profit over the season, but in the case of the Barnes show the amount was misleading because money was constantly sent back to Peru to pay off the loan from CCZG to buy and frame the show.

The expenditure or credit side of the ledger took up the right hand column of the front side and all of the back of the form. Each department was listed with sub-headings under most. The expenses of the advance, licenses (called "locals"), transportation, sleepers, general expense (which was something of a catch-all), paint, wardrobe, cook house, stables, office and administration, admission tax, loans, dividends, side show, lights, privilege car, commissary, candy stands, animals, concessions, purchases, winter quarters, and ledger accounts (another

catch-all account) were all categorized. The weekly payroll totals were entered on the same form, but on its own sheet. The individual salary breakdown was always listed in another ledger. An enumeration of the sub-headings under the advance department gives an idea of the ledger's exquisite detail: press ahead, bill posting, livery hotel, newspaper, car #1

cash, car #2 cash, brigade, general agent, special agent, contracting agents, 24-hour men, press back, checker up, flour, tacks, printing, miscellaneous, telegrams, banner puller, freight on advance car, and auto truck expenses. This was clearly an indispensable management tool. Mugivan and Bowers knew exactly where their money was being spent, and on occasion rebuked Cronin for the vagueness of some entries.

The first statement, dated 5 January, the day Bowers bought the show, lists \$250,000 in receipts for the sale of capital stock, and \$151,336.53 of expenditures, \$150,000 of which was shown as "purchase of complete show," the rest mainly

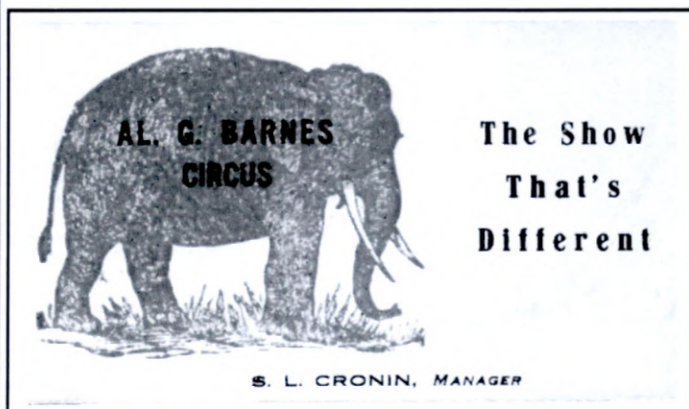
expenses incurred by Bowers, Cronin, Forstall, and Austin. That left a little under \$97,000 in the till to prepare the show for tour.

On 7 January Cronin asked Mugivan to send the old Sells-Floto big top tent to Baker-Lockwood to be remanufactured into a new menagerie top and marquee, the former to be an 80 foot round with five 40 foot middle sections. His comments about the tent's stakes typified the unremitting cost containment that was a hallmark of the ACC: "Put in the bottom of the car, under the canvas, 300 stakes, banded and made up. When they take the canvas out at the [Baker-Lockwood] factory to repair it they can unload the stakes also, and then when they reload to ship us all the canvas, they can put the stakes in the bottom of the car again, that way we will get them through free, as freight is awfully high out here."

On the 9th, a leopard died and soon after two lions, both of whom were blind, and a water buffalo. Cronin inquired if any of the other shows had a leopard that could be transferred to Barnes. Mugivan responded on the 12th, saying that the ones on the Robinson and Hagenbeck could not be spared, but that the Sparks show might have one. He also suggested Cronin check if I. S. Horne, a local wild animal dealer, might trade one for surplus Barnes animals. It turned out that one on the Robinson show was expendable, a male named Sam "who has been seat broke and worked and should make you a good riding leopard." The show was billed \$350 for Sam, plus the freight. When Mugivan wrote about the leopard, he told Cronin to ship four hyenas to the Robinson show since Barnes had six and only need two. In time this was done with the Barnes show receiving \$700 from the sale. Such inter-circus billings were a common feature of the accounting system.

Bowers, who stayed in Los Angeles until about 18 January, was also a frequent correspondent with his partner. In the first days after buying the show he wrote about hiring a train master, painter, and cook house steward. While some bosses from the 1928 show were retained, the ACC put their own people in most executive positions, particularly those handling money. In another note, he advised getting California plates for the motor vehicles on the show, rather than Indiana ones, because California's \$3.00 license fee was the lowest in country. On the 10th he assured Mugivan, "Everything is going along very nicely here for the number of days they have had it. I expect to leave here just as soon as I get them straightened out."

On the 14th he sent a list of the animals back to Peru, and asked that when they



Business card used by S. L. Cronin in 1929. Pfening Archives.

the heading "Total Shows Receipts." The revenue from the candy stands, balloons, the privilege car, banners, cotton candy, portage, fines, interest, the fortune teller (called "fortunes"), side show sword box, and side show photo sales were recorded below the ticket receipts. This area also had enough blank space to enter intermittent revenue from such sources as route card sales, the slot machine and games in the pie car, the show's cut of the barber privilege, ducies (sacked meals for workingmen, often spelled duckies). These figures were then added to the tick-



were incorporated into a master list of all the ACC's animals, at least six copies be sent to Baldwin Park to distribute to the movie studios. The Barnes show had always picked up extra income in the off season by renting exotic animals for films, and Bowers intended to continue, if not expand, that business.

On 15 January, Cronin wrote Mugivan about hiring a banner solicitor, and also informed him that Austin had stated that the show didn't have time to put out a program, but thought a special program could be thrown together for the Los Angeles stand. Mugivan wrote back that there was still time, and he would discuss the matter with Austin when he returned to Peru. Mugivan's concern was not that the patrons needed a program, but that the ads in it were a money maker, and Standard Oil had already contracted for ads in all five shows' books.

More personnel matters followed. George Tipton, who had been hired to run the cook house, was trying to hire people away from the other ACC shows when he had specific orders not to do so; Cronin said he would sit on him, to which Mugivan replied that Tipton "shouldn't be given too much leeway." Cronin also suggested hiring Nels Lausten as superintendent of inside tickets; Mugivan rejected the idea, and recommended two others. On the 19th he warned Cronin about a situation on the Robinson show in 1928 which could become a problem on Barnes: "THIS IS CONFIDENTIAL and for your own information and protection: Baney [who had been contracted to run the pie car and the sleepers] wanted the privilege of changing people in the cars and charged them for doing so and got peeved at Mr. Chase [the Robinson manager] when he would not have that sort of thing. Also—Mr. Chase put padlocks on the slot machines and wouldn't let Baney clean them unless he, Chase, were present."

By the 20th, the treasury was depleted by about \$11,500 as the intensive work of readying the show for the road began in earnest. The biggest expense was about \$3000 for shop and hardware supplies which was used to refurbish the wagons. Another big item was a little over \$1500 for spec wardrobe. Most of the other expenditures were unexceptional items such as feed for the animals and payroll. Non-recurring entries included the attorney's fee in buying the show, and \$1443.10 worth of printing from Al G. Barnes which he may have held out when he sold his circus.

The expenditures were offset a bit by revenue from winter quarters admissions, renting a team, the sale of hides, a stud fee, sale of ducies, and the show's cut of



Theo Forstall, Barnes circus treasurer, 1929. Pfening Archives.

the cook house receipts. The biggest income item by far was \$550 for the rental of animals to Grauman's Chinese Theater.

On the 21st Cronin wrote Mugivan about the band: "The salaries paid last year ranged from \$32.50 to \$38.50, which was figured without the cook house, so would figure to knock off from \$3.00 to \$5.00 per man from the above. I have hired the same bandleader—[Charles "Spud"] Redrick is his name for \$60.00 per week, also the mail [privilege] at \$10.00 and the Billboard privilege." Cronin stated that the previous season, band members, rather than contract directly with the show, signed with Redrick who in turn contracted the entire band as a unit with the circus. This was done to beat the higher union pay scale. Cronin told Redrick to use the same system, contingent on Mugivan's approval.

Mugivan wrote back saying at least \$5.00 should be deducted from the band salaries for board. Further, he said Redrick's scheme could cause serious Workmens' Compensation and liability problems, and advised Cronin to find some way to sign the musicians to the non-union rate with the standard form. In fact, Mugivan continued, all contracts should be over his signature as he was an officer of the company. Contracts signed by the band leader or any other non-officer were not legally binding; an injured employee signed by a non-officer might not be covered by Workmens' Compensation.

On the 22nd, Cronin sent Mugivan a list of tents needed in addition to the ones already on order. They included kitchen and butcher tents for the cook house, and an ice house, hamburger, and three out-

side stand tents for concessions. The next day he informed Mugivan of two ideas: "The wagon they have been using for a candy wagon here is a very nice wagon, and with about \$40.00 worth of gold leaf it can be made into a good looking reserved seat ticket wagon, and used for side show trunk wagon. It will make a much nicer flash on the front midway than the wagon they used last year, and is more the size that we will need for the side show trunks. We can use the last year's white wagon for a candy wagon, that is just reverse the two wagons, and I think it will be better all around. We can also take one of those express wagons that I wrote you can be bought for \$30.00 and build a monkey cage for the menagerie out of same, using mostly the odds and ends from the shop after the other wagons are all finished, so it won't cost much. They have not had a monkey wagon here, been carrying them in the dog wagon, in boxes set in other cages, and in the possum bellies. Looks like we will have train room to load such a wagon if have time to build it."

And so it went as the Al G. Barnes Circus began to take shape. An immense amount of work was accomplished in the first seventeen days the ACC owned the show, but far more was needed to ready the troupe for the 27 March opening. Those preparations and the early part of the tour will be the subject of the next installment of this opus.

#### Footnotes

1. James A. Bailey, in fact, appears to have misled the stockholders when he took Barnum and Bailey Ltd. public in 1899. Richard E. Conover accuses him of "engineering a shady stock promotion" in *The Affairs of James A. Bailey*.

2. The circuses were not the only asset Mugivan and Bowers had on the market. On 11 January 1929, Mugivan wrote Bowers: "The people who were interested in buying the bank have been here a couple of times with their auditors and the auditor has gone over the bank pretty thoroly [sic]. Today one of the principals in the deal was here and after going into things from all angles he offered 150 per share for the stock. Of course that isn't the best they will do as no one offers their best first, but it gives us an idea of what others outside would consider the bank worth under present conditions. We have not had the stockholders meeting as yet and will not do so until we get the final decision out of these people. They promise a definite proposal in a day or two. Will advise you if there is anything doing." Bowers was president and Mugivan vice-president of the Wabash Valley Trust Co. in Peru; their association starting in 1923. Mugivan was president and Bowers vice-president of the Wabash Valley Building and Loan which they organized in 1927. This deal went nowhere as both retained their banking interests until their deaths.



Holiday Greetings  
from  
**Allan C. Hill**

Who Proudly  
Announces  
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*"Class Entertainment In a Class By Itself"*

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PROFESSIONAL  
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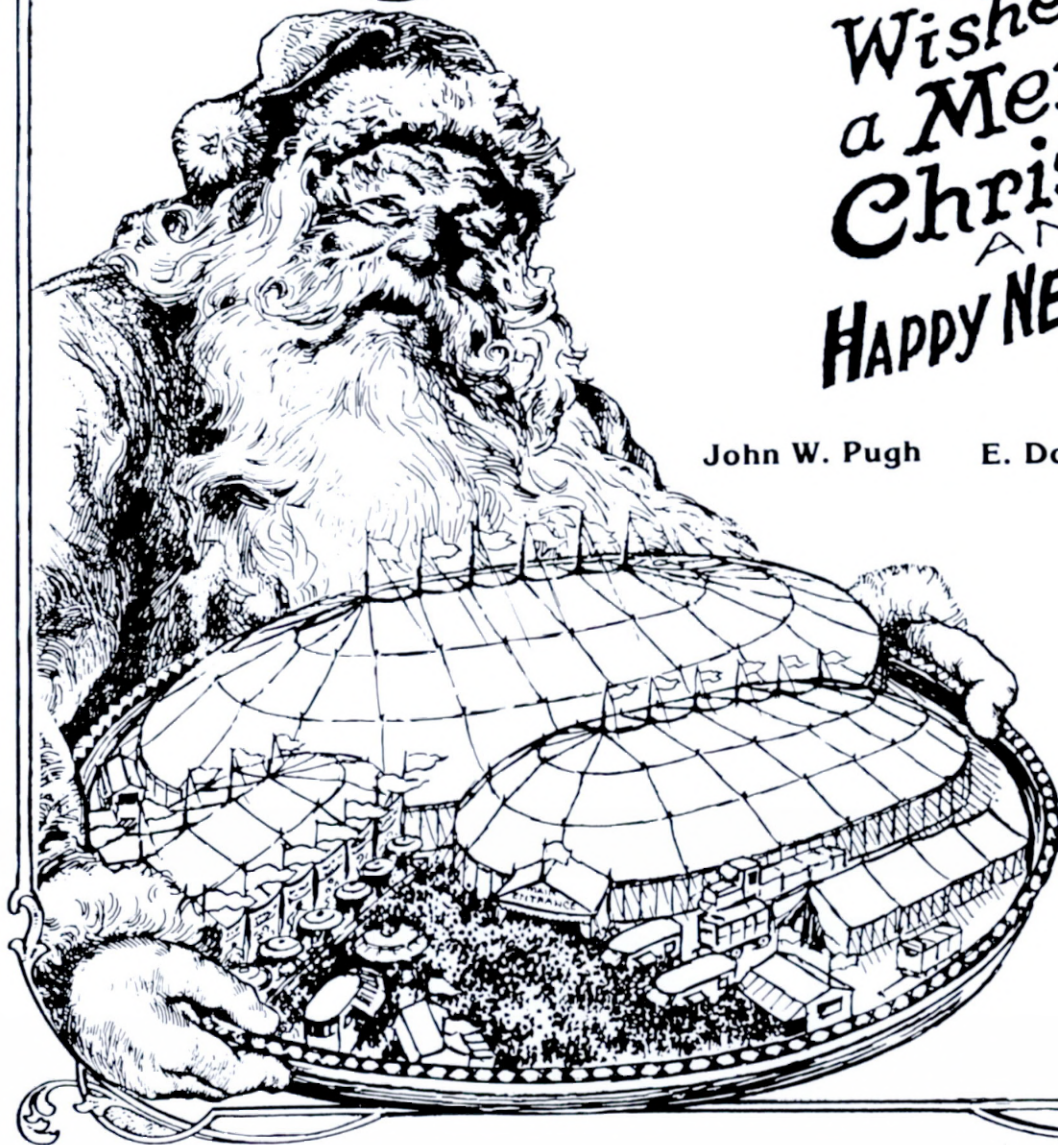
in  
Sarasota  
and  
the Entire Florida Area



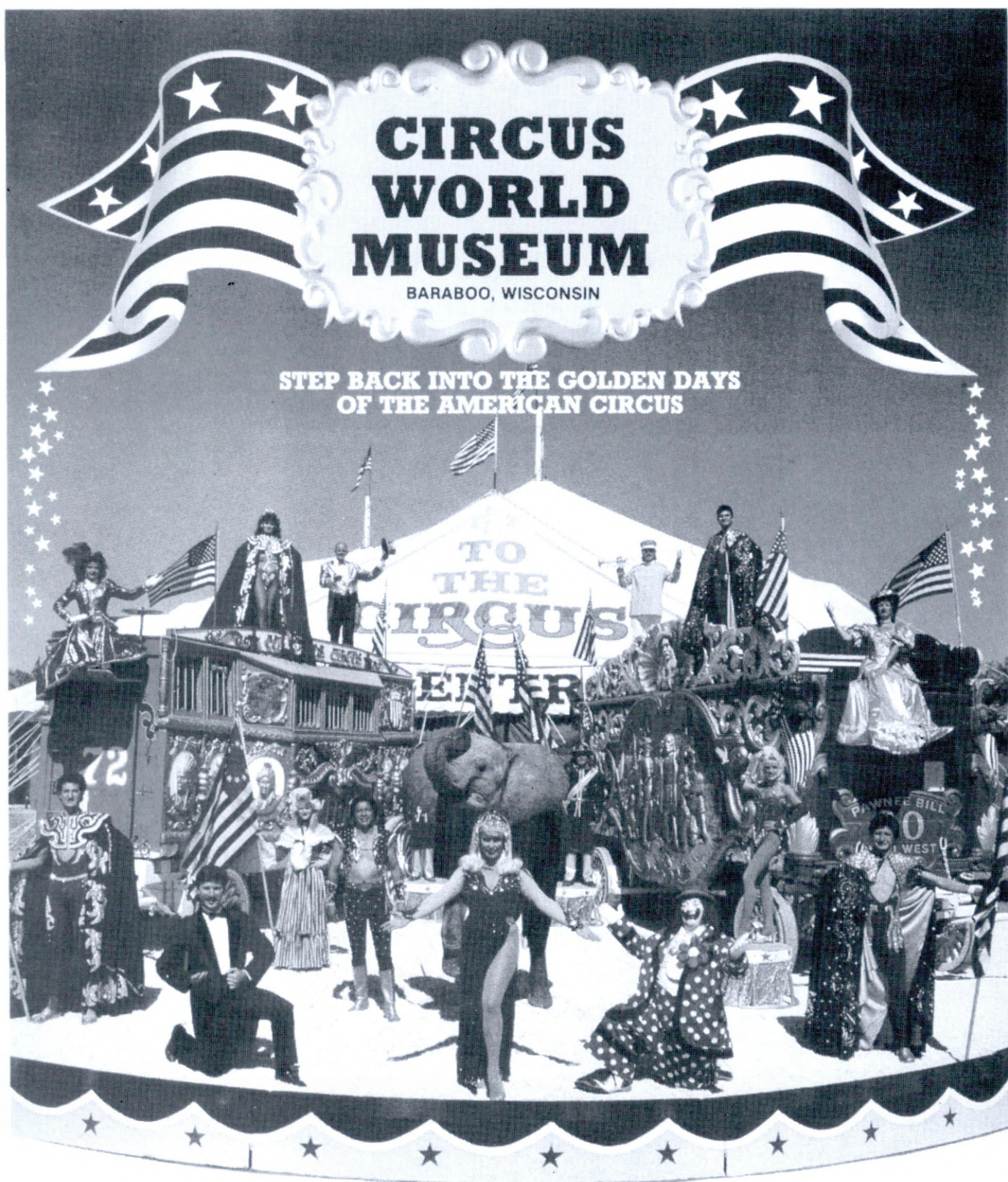
# CLYDE BEATTY COLE BROS.

Wishes You  
a Merry  
Christmas  
AND  
HAPPY NEW YEAR

John W. Pugh    E. Douglas Holwadel







Season's Greetings!



**L**ike many young boys Ayres Davies dreamed of life on the road with a circus. In 1936 at age 16 he joined out with Vanderburg Bros., a four truck trick traveling the hills of Wisconsin. The following two summers he was with Russell Bros. Circus. In 1939 at age nineteen he was a working man with the Greatest Show on Earth.

The war came and Davies served in the South Pacific as a Marine. Following his discharge as a lieutenant he went to work in an office in Chicago. He gave some thought to a career as a lawyer. The Chicago job lasted only six weeks but it introduced him to his future wife.

In 1946 Davies returned to the sawdust trail as supervisor of working men on the James M. Cole Circus. Cole, also a veteran, returned his circus to the road that year. On July 20, 1946 Davies and Kathryn Parker Snyder were married in Chicago.

Following the 1946 summer tour Jimmy Cole opened a indoor fall tour of schools. The Davies stayed and carefully noted all details of the operation.

Davies life-long dream was to own his own circus and he began making plans in the fall of 1945 to start his own show. In a 1975 Davies article in which he reviewed his career, he told of his first show: "Our circus was started in the fall of 1946 as a one-day stand indoor operation.

"It took to the road the 15th of January 1947. It was financed with a few thousand dollars saved during months in the Pacific during World War II. Featured was the Ed Morris five people teeterboard act. The Corriell Family of jugglers and head balancers were also on the bill. The DeWaldos presented an excellent unicycle and dog act. We had a pony drill of our own. Paul Zallee was producing clown, supported by Shorty Adkinson. The first winter was nip and tuck financially but the show stayed out ten weeks. We braved 19° below and heavy snow in Illinois and Wisconsin."

Ayres and Kay went back to the Jimmy Cole Circus for the 1947 summer season where he was side show canvas boss.

On September 23, 1947 Davies sent this information to the *Billboard*: "The Ayres and Kathryn Davies circus will open its second season near Dixon, Illinois on October 29. All acts are not contracted as yet, but featured will be Tama Frank and Patsy's knife throwing and whip cracking act which has been a

## SHORT SKETCHES OF FORMER SHOWS

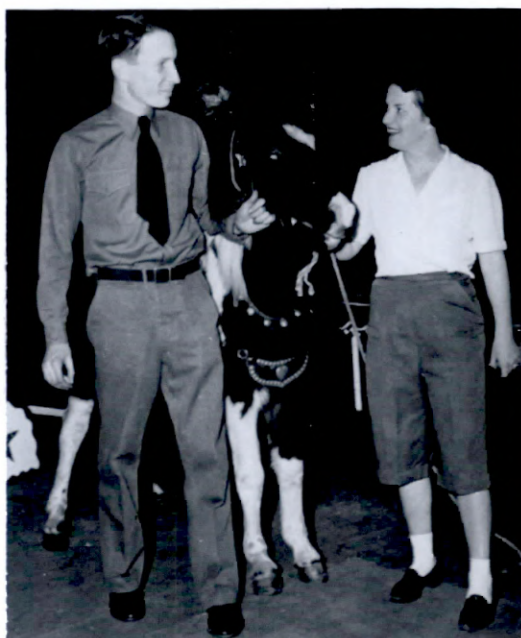
# AYRES & KATHRYN DAVIES CIRCUS

BY FRED D. PFENING, JR.

concert attraction with the James M. Cole Circus for the past two years. They will also present their high school horse, their dog act and riding dogs and monkey. In clown alley, Paul Zallee and Shorty Adkinson will be back again. Edna Earl is to have the concessions.

"The show will play one and two day stands in auditoriums and gymnasiums. We will again play northern Illinois and Wisconsin territory, staying out five or six weeks before the holidays and then reopening for an extended season on

Ayres and Kay Davies on their opening day January 18, 1947 in Mendota, Illinois. Davies collection.



January 15. A calliope will be carried for street ballys."

Davies continued: "Our winter show took to the road again in late October of the same year with a new program. Featured was the three lion act of Captain Eugene Christy; the steel arena was a great novelty in the buildings. Tama Frank and Patsy were there With their rope, whip, and knife throwing acts which had been the concert with Jimmy Cole in 1946. They also had a menage horse, riding dogs and monkeys, and a dog act. Tilton and Heerdink offered a bar act, rolling globe and a contortion bit. Paul and Shorty were back; and Paul rendered concerts on his calliope outside the buildings an hour before the show. Business was terrific over the entire route of fall 1947 and winter of 1948."

The indoor show reopened on January 15, 1948 in Rochelle, Illinois and played dates in the Chicago suburbs such as Chicago Heights, Lemont, Glen Ellyn, Cicero, Tinley Park and Des Plaines. On February 2 the show was in Remington, Indiana and then returned to Illinois, staying in that state though February 19. Six dates were played in Wisconsin the last week of February. Davies laid off for two weeks and then reopened at Paw Paw, Illinois on March 15. The indoor tour closed on March 22, 1948 at Shannon, Illinois. In three weeks the canvas circus was prepared for the road.

"The suburbs of Chicago, however, was where the gold was buried," Davies continued. "They had been untouched since the Russell tour in 1938, of which I had been a part. We decided to try a tent operation in the spring, if we could get the equipment. Late in February Neal Walters, the show printer, ran an ad in the *Billboard* announcing the sale of the defunct C. R. Montgomery Circus equipment. I went down to Eldorado, Kansas where the show had stalled; bought the side show top, a sixty with a thirty foot middle; got my pick of rigging, maskings, ticket boxes, stakes, etc.; and loaded it all on a seat wagon semi pulled by a 1941 Ford tractor. Before I got out of town I had to put a new motor in the truck, the block had been frozen.

"Back in Illinois we acquired the light plant, a marquee, seats and some ancient side show banners from the unsuccessful Beebe Bros. venture. Adding this to the truck and trailer we already had plus our personal automobile which pulled our house trailer, we launched the venture in Dixon, Illinois, April 20, 1948.

"From the beginning we had some ex-



**THURS., NOV. 20**

**A Winter Frolic in  
Summer Sawdust  
AYRES AND KATHRYN DAVIES**



Featuring  
A SCORE OF ARENIC WONDERS FROM  
THE NATION'S BIGGEST BIG TOPS

**2 Performances in HIGH SCHOOL GYM**

AFTERNOON AT 2:30, EVENING AT 8 O'CLOCK

Featuring These Big Time Circus Acts:  
CAPT. EUGENE CHRISTY'S TRAINED LIONS.  
TAMA FRANK AND HIS WONDER HORSE RULER.

**THE WHIRL OF DEATH**

A Sensational Knife Throwing Exhibition

Patsy Lee's Educated Canines Paul Zallee, comedy juggler  
Shorty, famous midjet clown Tilton & Heerdink, Aerial Performers

Trained animals, Acrobats, Jugglers, the inevitable circus callopie, and of course, popcorn, peanuts and all the other trimmings that go with a real circus.

Those who have seen this show recommend it highly. Don't miss it! Bring your friends.

Sponsored by CHILTON KIWANIS CLUB.

Davies newspaper ad used in Chilton, Wisconsin in 1947. Davies collection.

cellent help. Paul Zallee had operated both circuses and dramatic shows on his own. Tama Frank had a lot of 'know-how' and helped put the show together. Walt Raudenbush who had come over from the Jimmy Cole show stayed to the end. At the beginning I went ahead as both agent and billposter. After the first several weeks, it was obvious that this would not work.

"Luck seemed to be with us. Joe McMahon, a young man who had been on the front door of the Jimmy Cole show and who had been a good friend of mine before Kay and I were married, wired. He wasn't happy and was looking for a new job. He joined me on the advance in Cicero, Illinois. Posting bills was a new routine for him and I took him along on committee calls. Later in the season he spent all of his time on the advance—thus started his life-long career. In the Chicago area he used to be back on the show every night and in later years said ours was the only circus he ever trouped with where you booked during the day and had to help tear down at night."

The *Billboard* covered the opening of the show and published the following: "Dixon, Illinois, May 8.—With good weather, the Ayres and Kathryn Davies Circus launched its initial outdoor season here April 20-21 under Junior Chamber of Commerce auspices. Attendance on both dates bettered org's previous engage-

ments here when it played indoors, the management said.

"Show played Amboy, Illinois, April 22 under PTA auspices to good business. The show is being transported on 14 trucks, cars and trailers, and is presented under a 60-foot top and one 30.

"Program includes display No. 1 opening spec; No. 2 Lew's equestrian dogs and monkeys; No. 3 Paul Zallee, comedy juggler; No. 4 Betty Tilton, contortions; No. 5 Paul Zallee and Roy Adkisson, clowns; No. 6 Tama Frank and Ruler, menage; No. 7 Swinging ladder; No. 8 Clowns; No. 9 Betty Tilton, rolling globe; No. 10 Patsy Lee's dogs; No. 11 Clowns; No. 12 Military ponies worked by Tama Frank; No. 13 Tama Frank Jr., rope spinner and No. 14 Betty Tilton, single trapeze.

"The concert features Tama Frank and Patsy, whip cracking and impalement act, with the James M. Cole Circus last season. Big show runs an hour, with the concert consuming a half hour.

"Staff includes Mr. and Mrs. Ayres Davies, owner-managers; Ayres Davies, general agent; Kathryn Davies, treasurer; Harry Palmer, superintendent; Walter Raudenbush, boss canvasman; Eddie Bosse, lights; Gene Rogers, ring stock and pony ride; Edna Earl, concessions.

"The side show carried by the organization was not set up for opening. Show is using a callopie for downtown street ballys. Clifford Gilman, of this city, did the painting and lettering.

"Show will play its established indoor territory in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa and Michigan. a route it has made for the last two winters."

Inside the Davies big top on opening day in Dixon, Illinois on April 20, 1948. Davies collection.



On September 5, 1948 Davies wrote to the *Billboard* as follows: "This organization closed its first season under canvas at Dyer, Indiana on August 31. It is being readied for the indoor season which opens October 8. The tent show was out just short of twenty weeks and covered three states, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. The season was considered satisfactory for the first year in the tented field. All equipment is stored in Dixon, Illinois and plans are under way for a bigger show next season. Two middles will be added to the big top and a side show will be carried."

Davies later recalled: "The 1948 season was a real struggle. One of the acts left for fairs and we couldn't get any new talent. The show was short and the matinee some times left the town folks unhappy. There were advance headaches, and at one time it was only three days ahead of the show. At one time Walt and I moved the show with kids, but we didn't miss a day and stayed out twenty weeks.

"Four weeks after we rolled up the tent at Dyer, Indiana, on August 31. The indoor tour got under way on October 8 in Dixon. Kay stayed home to put our son in school. Joe was the manager; and I went out ahead again. Iowa and western Wisconsin were poor. An elephant act that was booked didn't show up. This did not help. As usual we counted on the suburbs, scheduled for November, for our bankroll. Joe hired the Frazier Family, who had made a winter tour with Jimmy Cole. Jack, the father, did a table rock. The sons Johnny and Corky were clowns working with their new brother-in-law, Harry Rawls as straight man. The daughter, Mary, worked wire that fall. Harry, also did a bull whip and rope routine. For





This Davies truck carried ponies in 1948 and the big top canvas in 1949 and 1950. It pulled a trailer with the side show canvas in the later two years. Pfening Archives.

the big Elgin, Illinois date we augmented with the Romig and Rooney riding act, including Irving Romig, the famous clown. After Christmas Christy's lions returned. Joe McMahon decided to stay home in Rochester and was replaced as manager by Joe Scharoun, also from the Jimmy Cole show. Business was terrific. The fall indoor tour closed in Chesterton, Indiana on November 13.

The January 1949 *Bandwagon* carried this report on the Davies 1948 show: "The Ayres and Kathryn Davies Circus made its outdoor appearance during the summer of 1948. The one ring show winters at Dixon, Illinois.

"They carry a sixty-foot big top with a thirty-foot middle, a menagerie top and side show tent. The side show is never open and the banner line of Gay 90's is for appearance only. They also have a pony ride and concessions on the midway. The show owned rolling stock consists of a large semi-trailer, a small stock truck, light plant, calliope and house trailers.

"The big top has a seating capacity of four hundred, consisting of biblebacks six

Davies pole semi-trailer and light plant in Baraboo in 1949. Pfening Archives.



high with seven-high blues on one end.

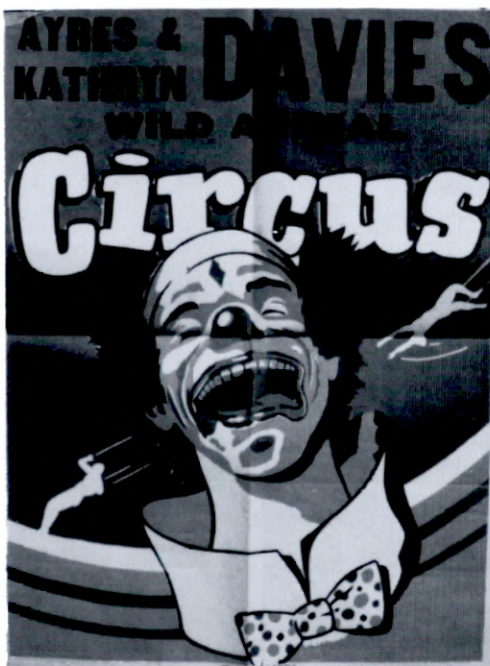
"The program is very strong for a small show which closes with a pony drill leased from C. R. Montgomery. Many who have caught this small circus believe that it will soon grow."

Davies remembered: "With another summer season approaching we were hesitant about trying another canvas tour. It was expensive, acts were difficult to hire, the advance was more complicated, and moving was a whole different problem. Fortune was with us; an agent showed up one afternoon. He had booked magic shows. Though the circus was new to him, he made an excellent appearance, had a fine reputation, and could get the best of service clubs. The whole indoor troupe wanted to help get us out under canvas again. Jack Frazier, a skilled mechanic, agreed to run my light plant, a constant headache the year before. Harry Rawls was willing to try framing and operating a side show. We bought a seventy by thirty square ended carnival tent from U. S. Tent and Awning for one hundred and twenty five dollars. There were banners from the Beebe show, a sword box from the Montgomery show, and we bought a set of second hand punch figures in Minneapolis. Harry bought some magic tricks and started his side show career. Ollie Heerdink and his wife Betty were contracted for the season. The year before they had only stayed until the fairs began in July. He also had the floss and popcorn.

"Now that the show was well staffed I needed someone to handle the billing chores ahead and to fill in holes in the route so that the agent could stay far enough ahead of the show. I had heard of Raymond Duke for some years. He had literally covered Northern Illinois with Stevens Bros. paper in 1947. Everywhere I

went in Indiana schools the principals knew him from his booking the Silverlakes' Fisher Bros. Indoor Circus. In the spring of forty-nine Raymond went out ahead in his lemon shaped Willys automobile as bill poster, Sunday agent, and special agent.

"The year was a winner all of the way, both indoor and out. With the tent we played the Wisconsin resort circuit and ventured into Michigan for the first time going up to the Straits. In the suburbs we had an imitator and competition from the newly framed Hagen Bros. Circus. In Wisconsin we bumped into Kelly-Morris for the first time. With the tent we played a few big towns—Manistee, Michigan, Harvey, Illinois and Baraboo, Wisconsin. But as a rule stayed in the hamlets under two thousand population.



This poster is typical of those printed by Central Show Print for the Davies show. Pfening Archives.

"The canvas trek came to an end the seventh of September, but the trucks were not idle long. The fall building tour got underway the first week in October which took the show into Minnesota for the first time and added Ohio just before Christmas, winding up with a sell out date at Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois. In forty-nine we were out forty-two weeks, suffered 100° temperature on the fourth of July and packed the house in 28° below in Northern Wisconsin in February. We had one blow down with the tent, but didn't lose a performance or a day—except one town in Indiana during the polio epidemic—nobody came for the matinee."

The May-June 1949 *White Tops* carried



this review: "Under the auspices of the Lions Club of Dixon, Illinois, the Ayres and Kathryn Davies Circus opened its season on April 20-21, 1949. This fine little one ring circus finished its successful indoor season early this spring and returned to its winter quarters in Dixon, Illinois in March to prepare for its second tour of the mid-western states under canvas.

"Owned and operated by a former CFA member who spent several seasons before with Russell Bros. Circus when that show was operated by the Webbs, and following service with the Marine Corps spent two seasons with the James M. Cole Circus, he has put together a very pleasing and entertaining show.

"Traveling on about fifteen trucks and trailers the Davies show plays practically all dates under auspices. The routing of general agent G. A. Stowall has given the show many good stands so far this season; especially late May and early June when they played many of the suburbs around Chicago. Raymond Duke, a former clown, does the promotion work with the auspices and according to owner Davies, has done a very commendable job.

"The top, while not new this season, is in fairly good condition. It is a 70 with one 30 and seats a little over 1000. On the midway is a lunch wagon and a popcorn and floss concession and the sideshow. The side show is under the direction of Harry Rawls, Jr. and has for its attractions a whip cracker, a Punch and Judy, a cage of monkeys and a lecture on lions by Captain Eugene Christy. Christy's four lions being exhibited in the side show.

"Inside the big show is featured Capt. Christy and his lion act. This act features Zimbo the world's only waltzing lion. Captain Christy presents an entertaining fast moving act with his two lioness.

#### PROGRAM

"No. 1 Johnny Pringle and his dogs; No. 2 Clowns; No. 3 Swinging Ladder with Betty Tilton; No. 4 Captain Eugene Christy and his lions; No. 5 John Frazer on the tight wire; No. 6 Clowns; No. 7 Miss Betty Tilton on rolling globe; No. 8 Johnny Pringle and his pick out mule; No. 9 Montgomery's military ponies presented by Johnny Pringle; No. 10 Table balancing by Jack Frazer; No.



The Davies circus on a lot in 1949. Side show top is at left, with marquee and big top at right. Pfening Archives.

11 Trick and fancy rope spinning by Harry Rawls; No. 12 Clowns; No. 13 Single trapeze by Miss Betty Tilton.

"Harry Rawls is the equestrian director and keeps the show moving at a fast pace besides turning the records which furnish the music for the show. Corky Frazer heads the clowns.

"On a second visit to this show at Ashton, Illinois on June 8th a capacity audience was on hand for the night performance. Following a few more stands in Northern Illinois, the show was headed into Wisconsin."

The program listed in the *White Tops* article indicated that the performance changed during the year.

Davies later related: "The 1950 season started a little earlier than usual in Paris, Illinois on January 12th. Duke and Stowell were ahead, and I stayed back with it as manager and worked the pony drill and my dogs, monkey, and riding fox.

This Davies semi-trailer served double duty as stock truck and pole wagon. Four bunks on chains dropped from the roof for working men. Curtains covered the sides on cold or wet nights. Pfening Archives.



The winter season was long, but spotty. The folks were moving televisions into their homes and they didn't come out to the night show. We opened under canvas in Dixon with a bigger top, a sixty with two forties, and a dramatic end. It was an impressive spread. We fed thirty five in the cookhouse that summer. On the advance we used a herald for the first time and posted paper. Raymond really covered the country.

The spring was cold and wet, but the sun came out the Fourth of July in Land-of-Lakes, Wisconsin where we packed the seats. We had the capacity and a better program than most ten truck shows. All we lacked was an elephant and this we could never afford. Elephants were scarce after World War II. An unbroken baby cost five thousand, which was more money than we had ever seen in one lump sum in those days."

In 1950 the show moved on the following show owned trucks: A station wagon carrying the concession stock, pulling the Davies living trailer which served as the office; a semi-trailer carrying big top poles and stakes, eleven sections of blues, nine sections of reserved planks, four ponies, a horse and a mule; a short 1 1/2 ton van carrying the big top canvas and pulling a trailer with the side show canvas and tables for the cookhouse; a 1 1/2 ton International truck carrying the light plant and all electrical equipment. Privately owned units included four trucks, one semi, two buses, four living trailers and three cars.

Tom Parkinson, *Billboard* circus editor, visited the show in Deerfield, Illinois on June 10 and the following appeared in the June 17, 1950 issue: "Its true what they say about Ayres Davies. He built his circus with a small bank roll and the help of a GI loan, and he wants an elephant in the worst way.

"Now in its third under-canvas season, the Ayres & Kathryn Davies Circus is playing to steady, satisfactory business. The matinee here recently drew a straw house of 900 children. The banner so far this season was Hinsdale, Illinois, where 1,000 youngsters jammed the top of the matinee, with the night show nearly as good. McHenry, Illinois gave solid business although this was the third successive year there



for the organization and the auspices representative didn't know what to do with the advance ticket supply.

"The Davies show moves on five trucks—three of them show-owned—plus five house trailer rigs. More significantly, it moves on troupers' spirit that develops when the people know they have a good thing that requires some work.

"Sparkplugs of the outfit are Mr. and Mrs. Davies, but everyone else is close behind. That means about 30 people, counting children and all.

"Old timers will find similarities here with the early days of Haag, Clark and other organizations that started from scratch. Davies made his own ring curbs and props. He has used ordinary buckets for light reflectors.

"The trouping has been tough at times. Davies lost Mount Morris, Illinois, when the top blew down after the matinee. High winds continued the next day and the show was side-walled. Last winter the coal strike closed several schools booked by the show.

"Except when playing suburban areas such as this Davies is a heavy user of her-alds which are mailed to box holders.

"Getting top attention on the show is Capt. Eugene Christy's lion act. He has three sprightly cats and gives the performance valuable weight. The arena is set up apart from the three rings. Billing also stresses Bob Mason in the side show with his vent act.

"The performance bows with a spec, the show's first. Ten people take part. Davies notes that it's no great shakes but he reasons that if you want a spec the best thing to do is give one, not wait until conditions are ideal.

"For the pony, dog and monkey that follows, Ayres takes over in ring one and Elmer Questell in another. This is the routine turn of a pony passing under a stand from which the pups or monks jump to its back. The show owner broke these acts as he did several others.

"Harry Villeponteaux makes his first appearance in a traps-contortion act that pleases the kids. He's followed by Carroll Hodgson's and Mary Rawls' ladder act. Then Harry's back to start his series of clown numbers—this one a comedy contortion routine. The lion act follows.

"Davies and Questell trade rings to present their single-



The Davies show on the lot in Brookfield, Illinois in 1950. Davies collection.

pony turns next and the equines perform with teeterboards and tubs. Mary Rawls gives a good center-ring wire act. Bob and Caroline Hodgson come on with fast Roman rings, one of the show's strongest acts.

"June Carroll (Hodgson) has the center spot next for her roly-boly act. Villeponteaux does a clown bit with an assortment of fireworks. Davies and Queatell come in again this time with wire walking dogs. Bozo Villeponteaux winds up with a clown-vest number climaxed by a rock-and-fall from a step-ladder. Caroline Hodgson display more of that troupe's excellent wardrobe and circus talent with her single traps turn. Then Davies seals the deal with his four pony drill.

"There also are concert announcements. The wild west has Capt. Tom Tell (Questell), riding; the Hodgsons, ropes and whips; and Bob Mason, ropes and clowning.

"In the side show are Mason, vent, punch and magic; Harry Rawls, sword box; Bob Meyer, fire eater; an untamable lion (Christy's) and the horses and ponies.

"The show moves in the mornings, with

Davies bill stand in Alma, Michigan for the July 22, 1950 date. Pfening Archives.



reveille coming at 6:30. By about 8:30 a.m. the show is on its new lot and almost everyone is helping Walter Raudenbush, boss canvass man, with the 60 by 150 top that was included in the assortment Davies bought from Mack and Sandy's rep show for \$700. Its reloaded by

11:15 p. m.

"Bob Hodson is responsible for putting up the marquee. He also has the floss and popcorn concessions. Harry Rawls, in addition to side show and concert assignments, trades off with Davies as announcer and disk jockey for the show's mechanized band. Mary Rawls handles show-owned concessions in addition to her performing stints. Willie Rawls is kid pusher for the big top work. Jack Plant has the lights, and for this Davies has a new generator. Roy Hershberge has the ring stock.

"The Villeporiteax have the cook house and Harry is mail and *Billboard* sales agent. Lucy Questell has the front door. Mary Christy handles reserved seats. Kathryn Davies is in charge of tickets and office work but her title, like those of the others, is all-inclusive so she also sacks peanuts, ushers, hustles concert tickets and shoos children out of the rings.

"In advance are E. C. Stowell, general agent; Clifford Larson, assistant and Raymond Duke, brigade, with three men. Bill Rodd joins this week as another assistant to Stowell.

"Davies, who's on the short side of 30, sums up the show's policies this way: 'We stick to the sticks under better class auspices. This is a real mud show and to move it everybody has to work hard. We pitch for the money but we draw a definite line. And if the auspices doesn't want reserve seats sold, we don't sell them.'

"The couple started its indoor circus late in 1946. He got a pronounced negative from bankers when he sought a loan so he cashed \$1,000 in war bonds and hit the road. In 1948 he bought a semi-trailer truck and side show top from the stalled C. W. Montgomery Circus and began the first tent tour.

"After four weeks the truck's motor went out and Davies needed money. The bank again said no so Ayres got a GI loan. That first year he returned to Illinois with 25 cents. He opened the season with \$15. But he has never owed more than \$2,000 and has been making



money. The bank had a change of policy by the time the show's generator went out and Ayres telephoned for quick aid.

"Typical of the Davies operation is endless preparation for the future, tomorrow or next season. While playing indoor school dates, they spread out the tent in gymnasiums and repair it for the next season. Ayres has a horse with him now that he breaks in spare time for menage work.

"As for the elephant—well he wants it pretty bad. But he hesitates to over-spend. Besides just as he was set to see the banker about it, newspapers reported a bull had killed a child; two others stampeded and another herd was rescued from a fire.

"I decided we better let the elephant question wait awhile," he recalled. But when he does get an elephant it won't be a youngster, although a small one might fit better into his program. Davies will get one that can work on canvas; it will double like everyone else.

"Novelty is a factor which helps a small circus, Davies figures, so it can neither repeat often nor face much major show opposition. Towns of less than 3,000 are his best bet and in them the show seeks out auspices such as Parent-Teachers Associations, school band parents clubs, founding homes and youth organizations. Frequently, he has played his canvas show on school grounds and on occasion has hooked into the school's electric outlets.

"Outstanding on Davies' list of auspices have been churches with the Catholic and Methodist groups coming in most often. The banner stand of 1949 was Zeeland, Michigan, a Dutch Reform community where theaters, roller rinks and other amusements are nonexistent. Stowell signed the Rotary Club there and the club sent an inspection committee to see if the show would pass local standards.

"The only thing we had to change was a Punch and Judy line," Davies said. "We changed it from I'm the devil to I am your conscience. They packed the show for three performances."

"The concert, part of the concessions and other privileges are show-owned. Davies aims at a repertoire of eight acts which he and his wife could put on.

"If the bottom should fall out of these things, we'll stay in show business," he declared.

"Davies is doing his share toward reinforcing that bottom. Profits are plowed back to maintain and add equipment. The show is debt-free now and



The Davies light plant truck in 1950. There was a hay rack on top and two bunks inside for boss canvas man and a stock man. Pfening Archives.

no additions are made unless there is cash for them.

"They ask me how big I'm going to make this thing," Ayres said. "I've got no elaborate dreams. I just want to make it pay and if it doesn't do more than that we'll be Ragbag Bros."

"On the other hand, Ayres and Kathryn Davies have ambition and a loyal, energetic staff. One of these days they'll have that elephant."

Davies remembered his final year: "The last year out we had a new banner line in front of the side show. Inside, Harry Rawls presented magic, punch, and a sword box. He had a fire eater and Bob Mason with his vent dummies. Capt. Christy gave a lecture on the four lions; we had a cage of monkeys; and all of the stock was quartered in the top. We had a concert which did well headed by Tom Tell doing a shooting act, Harry Rawls did ropes and whips, and Corky Frazier clowning. Everybody doubled in brass.

"In June of 1950 I was thirty years old,

Harry Rawls making a side show opening with Bob Mason and his vent dummy in 1950. Davies collection.



Kay a year younger. We had worked day and night since 1946. We seemed to be on our way. We had bought a new light plant and replaced the truck. Canvas was becoming available after the war shortage and we were planning to order a new top for the next season. Then came the Korean war.

"Upon my discharge from the Marine Corps in 1946, I was asked if I would be interested in joining the Reserve. At the time I told the discharging officer that I would sign for the inactive reserve which required no commitment except in case of emergency. All enlisted reserves were called to duty that

summer. The officers were being called as needed. The cloud held over us for the rest of the season—I was a First Lieutenant.

"Late in September a storm between shows blew the dramatic end of the big top into shreds. We finished the remaining two weeks using half the tent like a 'wild west canopy' over the seats and presenting some of the program in the open surrounded by side wall. We were ready to order a seventy with three thirties for the next season. At the end of the trek I went to see the bankers in Dixon to get the credit to make the down payment to commence the construction. The bankers nodded and said, 'what about the reserve?'

"The fall indoor tour closed Thanksgiving Eve. There were two Christmas party dates scheduled at Chanute again and Scott Field. McArthur had said the war would be over by Christmas—then the Chinese jumped in and our troops were rushed out of North Korea. I went to headquarters in Chicago and was informed that I was on thirty day's notice. This was the end. On a cold December day we played our last date in a huge aircraft hangar and drove home to Dixon. It was 15 below when we pulled into town at midnight.

"Starting and operating one's own circus has been the dream of many an American boy, especially one

who grew up in a small town during the last days of the big railroad shows and the big street parade. A few such dreamers have become famous and wealthy—the Ringlings, but to most who ever took the chance, it has been a disappointment and financial disaster. We started the winter



"Had there been no Korean war is one of those 'ifs.' We had not adopted telephone promotion, which has been the backbone of most of today's circuses. After television had been moved into every household the night business was never the same. Anyway by the time the war

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Ayres and Kay Davies live in Ponce Inlet, Florida.







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TOMMY HANNEFORD  
Executive Producer

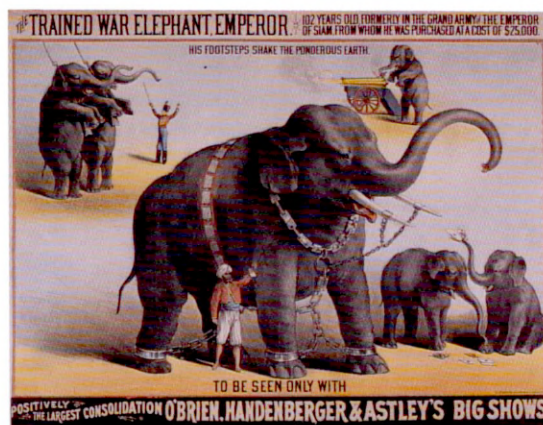
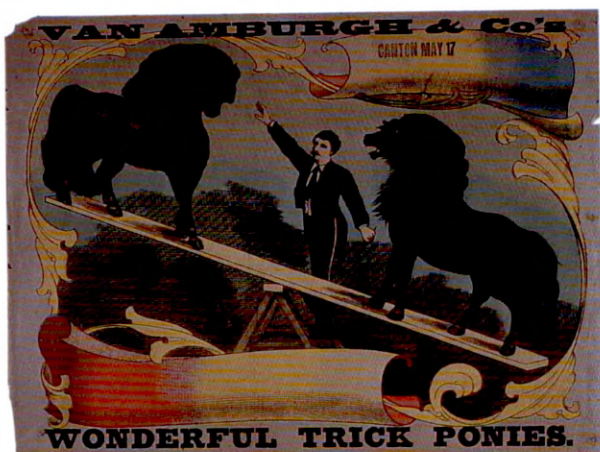


# GEMS FROM THE SHELBURNE MUSEUM COLLECTION

The Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont, owns a collection of approximately 575 circus prints and lithographs, including a number of extremely rare and in some cases unique early (pre-1840) items. Many of the real prizes, including virtually all the 18th and 19th century material, were originally collected by Harry Peters, Sr. and donated by his widow, Mrs. Natalie Peters, and their son, Harry Peters, Jr. and daughter, Mrs. Natalie Webster. Roy Arnold, creator of the 525 foot long scale model circus parade at the Museum, was the source of 175 posters. The remainder of the collection has come through small individual gifts and selective purchases. In addition to the wonderful discovery of the Adam Forepaugh posters, 1991 also brought a group of posters advertising the "Fairy Sisters," a midget troupe of the late 1870s, as well as extraordinarily rare original wooden and metal printing blocks for their posters and several articles of clothing worn by the sisters. Color photographs of the posters were taken by Ken Burris. The color separation negatives were provided by Bill Biggerstaff.











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**BAND ORGANS AND CALLIOPIES**-Circa 1920 National 4 Calliope-restored in 1989-set up for keyboard and automatic rolls. Circa 1910 Tangle Calliope-plays automatic rolls. The earth shaking whistles from these calliopes announced the coming of the circus. No parade would be complete without the "Brass Pipe" calliopes. Circa 1920 Wurlitzer 125 Military Band Organ-restored in 1988. It has two facades for effective parade use. Plays automatic rolls. Circa 1925 Wurlitzer 104 Band Organ. All play paper music rolls which can readily purchased. Each calliope and band organ comes with rolls.

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**GENUINE CAROUSEL ANIMALS (NO REPRODUCTIONS)**-Alan Herschell chopped main Jumper, Armitage in old Park Paint, Beautiful restored Illions, Parker mirrored and jeweled, Herschell Spillman in old park paint, Ormate Kidy-sized Savage, Spooner Pig, Large Savage Two-Seater Horse, Large Heyn Prancer, Kiddy-sized Bayol Horse, Outside row Parker Armored Horse, Denzel Horse in very old or original paint, Parker with peekaboo mane, Baygl Pig stripped to reveal its fine condition-at 78" this is a lot of pork, 6-1930 Alan Herschell combo Horses-wood bodies with metal head, legs and tail, 2 Spillman combo Horses with highly polished head, legs and tail, 4 Alan Herschell Kiddy Horses-Kiddy Horses are just the right size for apartments. 4 Anderson all wood Kiddy Horses, an impressive Carmel Stander, Spillman Trojan Horse, several outside middle and inside row Herschell, Spillmans and Parkers. 100 Genuine carousel Horses will be offered.

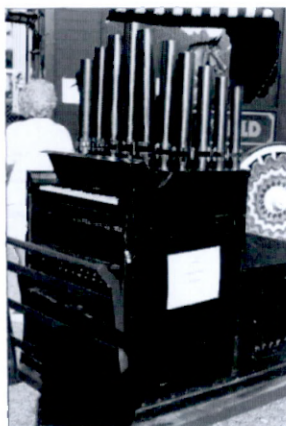
**ORIGINAL RECORDS AND EPHEMERA**-The Allen Herschell Co. consisting of correspondence, catalogs of carousels and other rides, blueprints of Kiddy Rides-Buggy Ride, Jeep Ride, Boat Ride, Auto Ride, Sky Fighter, Little Dipper Coaster and Merry-Go-Rounds plus scrapbooks. Showman's League convention programs, promotional items, old receipt books and more miscellaneous items.

**MERRY-GO-ROUND SCENERY**-Inside Scenery from Muller Carousel-probably from Loeff Factory and dated 1907-Painting on canvas, inside Scenery from Dentzel-this is original art. Signed Dentzel Chariot Side-one of a kind.

**JUKE BOXES/SLOT MACHINES**-8 Juke boxes-all working-some restored, 10 Slot Machines, Gumballs, Trade Stimulators, Neon, Gaming wheels. Peanut machines. Cash registers. Advertising, Toys.

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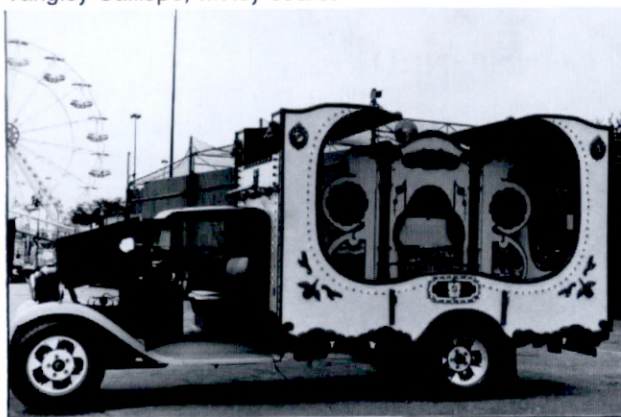




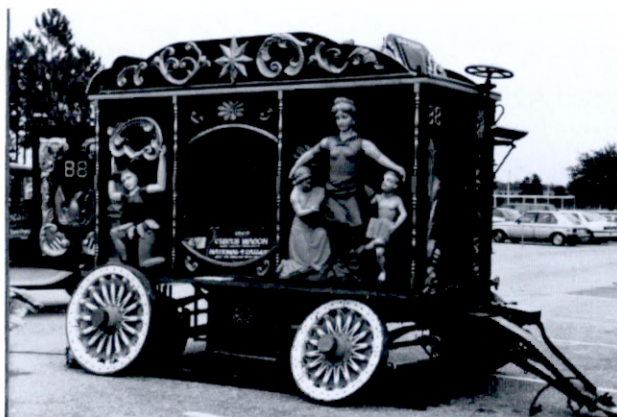
Tangley Calliope, w/Key board.

# 

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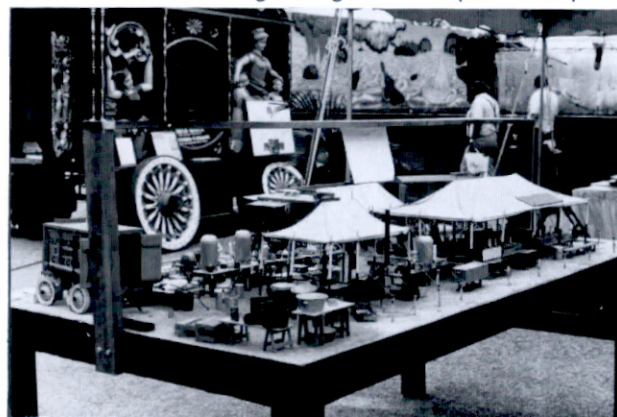
1932 Ford Model B parade vehicle, w/Wurlitzer Band Organ, 2 facades. Organ & truck sold separately.



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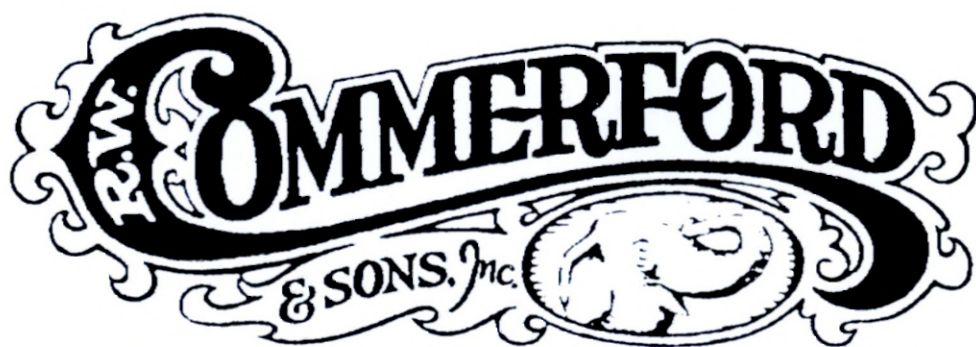
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## Introduction

Although the family of Alfred St. Leon have passed into the annals of Australian and American show business, recent research has uncovered this family's colourful but forgotten story. Alfred (1859-1909) was a younger son of the Australian showman Mathew St. Leon (c.1825-1903). Alfred was an exceptional circus equestrian and, through his marriage to a woman of another circus family, Vernon Ida Cousins, produced a family of talented performers.

As most of Alfred's family appear to have died without issue, there was no opportunity to record any family memories. Most of what follows is based on the somewhat impersonal sources of contemporary newspaper accounts and reference sources. I wish it were otherwise.

In order to put the history of the Alfred St. Leon family, as well as the future planned St. Leon articles, in context, I have devoted the initial part to a brief summary of the origins of the St. Leons and their Australian history. As the story of Alfred St. Leon's family would not be complete without an examination of his wife's forbears, I have also devoted space to the Cousins/Woodyear family as well.

John Jones, later known as Mathew St. Leon, was a tumbler at theatres and "gaslight" shows in London's Westminster around 1840. He was aged about 17 when convicted at London's Old Bailey, in June 1842, for the theft of a coat worth five shillings and sentenced to seven years transportation to Van Dieman's Land, the infamous British penal settlement off the south coast of the Australian mainland, now known as Tasmania. He and 239 other prisoners embarked from Spithead on the *Forfarshire*, a ship of 615 tons, under the guard of the soldiers of the 99th Regiment. The voyage around the tip of Africa and across the Indian Ocean to Hobart Town took 107 days.

After three years spent on the work gangs of Van Dieman's Land, Jones received his ticket-of-leave, effectively a remission of the remainder of his sentence. He wasted little time in preparing for his show business career in his newly adopted land. He earned a living as a tailor, for a while at least, but must have spent time revising the acrobatic work and clog dancing he had learnt in London as a youth.

An innkeeper named Robert (Bob) Radford, who had arrived as a free settler in Tasmania in 1844 or 1845, opened his Royal Amphitheatre, an arena next to his Horse and Jockey Inn in Launceston. Public exhibitions of horsemanship were given and it was the first successful circus enterprise in Australia. John Jones was a

# THE ST. LEONS IN AMERICA

PART ONE

## THE ALFRED ST. LEON FAMILY

By Mark St. Leon

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member of Radford's company from the opening night, the evening of Monday, 27 December 1847.<sup>1</sup>

Radford's equestrian repertoire ranged from old equestrian burlesques such as Billy Button or the Tailor's Ride to Brentford, presented the night his circus opened, to Ducrow's supreme piece the Courier of St. Petersburg, which Radford presented to audiences in Hobart in October 1848. It was a remarkable transposition of the traditions of Astley's Amphitheatre, and of Andrew Ducrow, to one of the most distant parts of the globe.

Probably during 1848 Jones met the Dublin-born Maggie Monaghan. One speculates that she might have been one of a swarm of young girls who watched the dashing John and other young men performing in the Radford circus each night in Hobart Town. On 21 December 1848, three days after the last performance of the Hobart season, they were married according to the rites of the Church of England at St. George's Church at Battery Point, a Hobart Town suburb.

An entrepreneur named Edward La Rosiere next engaged Jones and several other equestrian performers in Hobart Town at a weekly salary and paid their passage to Sydney.<sup>2</sup> Jones and his equestrian troupe, with La Rosiere, arrived there by the 510 ton barque, *Royal Saxon*, on 24 December 1849 after an eight day voyage. They opened a brief season at Sydney's City Theatre on Market Street on Monday, 21 January 1850.

Jones and his troupe appeared in Mait-

land, Singleton and a few other settled places, as well as Sydney, before moving onto the newly discovered gold fields around Bathurst, west of Sydney, in late 1851, some months after the discovery of gold there. With the discovery and opening of even richer gold fields in Victoria, John Jones and his equestrian troupe shipped for Melbourne late in 1852 and formed a circus that alternated between the new gold fields and provincial towns of the colony of Victoria. Jones' Circus was at Ballarat in the anxious days leading up to the Eureka Stockade incident of 1854, best described as Australia's version of Bunker Hill.

When the gold fever quietened, Jones' National Circus was one of the circus troupes to take its entertainments to the people of the bush and the new townships of the interior. It was during the visit of Jones' Circus to Beechworth, a gold mining community in north-eastern Victoria, that John Jones' fourth son, Alfred, was born on 29 March 1859.<sup>3</sup>

Jones gave away the circus business in 1863 and formed a gymnastic and variety troupe that consisted of himself and three of his sons, Gus, Walter and Alfred. Jones and his three sons dubbed themselves The St. Leon Troupe. The name of St. Leon was retained thereafter to promote the show business fortunes of Jones and his sons. Eventually the name became accepted as the family name.

Alfred St. Leon, 1859-1909. Author's collection.



The St. Leon Troupe, especially engaged "from the Gymnase Imperiale, Paris," made their debut with their "celebrated drawing room entertainment" at the Theatre Royal, Melbourne on 27 January 1865, under the management of the famous English actor, Barry Sullivan. For some five or six years after, the St. Leon Troupe travelled the eastern Australian colonies. Trapeze, tightrope walking, dancing and the like were sometimes complemented by comic songs and black face comedy. Alfred, the youngest of the troupe, charmed his audiences with his song *Some Lady's Lost Her Chignon*.



# ST. LEON'S BIG SHOW

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CHAMPION GYMNAST!

THE ARAB WONDER!

THE JAPANESE TROUPE!

ACROBATS! TUMBLERS!

**AN EFFICIENT BAND.**

M. ST. LEON, Circus Proprietor.  
R. HOWELL, Agent.

St. Leon's Big Show newspaper ad in November 4, 1879 *Yass Courier*. Author's collection.

As the three St. Leon boys grew older they longed to return to circus life with its excitement and camaraderie. Each of the boys took apprenticeships with the leading Australian circuses of the day. By the time the three brothers had earned their equestrian laurels, their father was ready to start a new circus.

The St. Leons formed their new circus enterprise, dubbed at first St. Leon's Royal Victoria Circus, on the outskirts of Melbourne in 1875 and commenced their travels of Australia. St. Leon's Circus soon became a power in the land. Its cavalcade of "150 men and horses," a half-mile long, headed by a glittering band carriage, brought happiness to the people of the bush and outback. The big show travelled far beyond the reach of the burgeoning railway systems and crossed the seas from the Australian mainland to Tasmania and New Zealand.

Word of the equestrian prowess of the St. Leon brothers had spread far and wide throughout the Australian colonies prior to the establishment of the Royal Victorian Circus. The three St. Leon brothers were often billed as "Australia's Favourites, The Great Bareback and Vaulting Equestrians."<sup>4</sup> They were "graceful riders and first class athletes" and distinguished themselves by their brilliant horsemanship. In 1878, Alfred was billed as "Eugene Alfred, America's [sic] star somersault rider," the world renowned jockey hurdle rider who could carry his flying steed over gates and bars with unequalled rapidity, at the same time performing the most perilous and astounding feats.<sup>5</sup>

The trend in Australian circus horsemanship from the mid-1870s onwards was toward an increasingly acrobatic style. This brasher and more thrilling form of circus horsemanship may have been imparted to local performers by the equestrians who came to Australia with the big American shows during the 1870s, but Australian circus equestrianism might have quite naturally developed in this direction given the athletic and sportsmanlike character of colonial society.

Early in their equestrian careers, the younger St. Leon brothers, Walter and Alfred, began to attempt mastery of the equestrian somersault too, a feat which the older Gus does not appear to have wanted to engage in. To succeed as a somersault equestrian, the boys had not only to be good horsemen but accomplished tumblers as well. By early 1879, they were already "very clever at equestrian somersaults," although they were expected to improve even further as they gained years. They were once described as "pad tumblers,"<sup>6</sup> a term that suggests that they relied upon a pad strapped to the horse's back, a convenience which would have made the somersault trick somewhat easier to execute.

In March 1881, St. Leon's Mammoth Circus played opposition to Woodyear's Circus at Hay, New South Wales. The encounter gave the dashing young Alfred St. Leon sight of his pretty opposite number, Vernon Ida Cousins, in the rival circus. Professionally, she was known as Ida Vernon. Before the year was out, Alfred and Vernon Ida married.<sup>7</sup> The new bride joined her husband in the St. Leon circus, by that time the largest circus in the Australian colonies.

In May 1882, the *Brisbane Courier* praised Vernon Ida's "neatly and cleverly performed" feats on horseback in the St. Leon circus. On horseback, Ida was described as "ladylike in appearance and comportment." She did not "gush nor put on the airs" which so often detracted from the usual performances of "ladies of the ring."<sup>8</sup> But, apart from these references, mention of Vernon Ida in the circus advertising was only occasional, no doubt due to her regular bouts of childbirth. She and Alfred had at least seven children, six

of whom survived infancy. They are listed in the table on this page.

Vernon Ida Bumpuss Cousins was the daughter, and the first of at least three children, born to Reuben and Jennie Cousins. Vernon Ida was so named for the *SS Vernon*, the 891 ton ship on which she was born at sea on 29 December 1862, and that brought her and her parents to Australia from England. The ship arrived in Sydney on 5 February after a passage of 93 days.

Vernon Ida's father was no stranger to Australia for he had toured the colonies in the 1850s with several major colonial circus companies. "The admired clown," Mr. Cousins, was a member of Burton's National Circus that opened in Geelong on 27 August 1855, the earliest known reference to him in the colonies.<sup>9</sup> For a while, Cousins joined James Ashton's "powerful company."

Reuben Cousins' name disappeared from the annals of the Australian circus for the greater part of 1861-2. It is apparent that he returned to England where he took as a [second?] wife the young Jennie Kendall. A native of Sherrington, Bucks, where she was apparently born on 2 September 1841, Jennie was the daughter of Charles Kendall and Elizabeth Kendall, nee Petts. After their arrival in Australia, Reuben Cousins once again travelled as a clown and jester with the colonial companies. He was "a very good clown of the heavy class but he is exceedingly nimble for his weight. His dialogue is free while almost all his jests have the charm of being new."<sup>10</sup>

Within a few months, Cousins was in Sydney organising his own splendid company, the Oriental Circus, for a tour of the East, perhaps the first ever by a circus company of Australian origin. But Cousins soon went "to that bourne from which no clown ever returns," dying of cholera in Java on 22 May 1866. The Oriental Circus was broken up and disbanded and Cousins young widow was left to fend for herself. Things were hard when she married an older man named John Percy Bumpuss, apparently for financial reasons. But Bumpuss did not live long.<sup>11</sup>

Evidently, Jennie was an accomplished circus rider. By 1869, she was back in Australia and touring with Henry Bur-

Name at birth	Birth Date	Place	Death
Golda	2 October 1882	Ipswich, Qld	Detroit, 1939
Elsie May	14 October 1884	Sydney, NSW	Los Angeles, 1967
Myrtle	August 1887	Grafton, NSW	Melbourne, 1890
Alfred George	16 June 1890	Not known	Los Angeles, 1955
Ida Jeannie	16 January 1894	Sydney, NSW	Los Angeles, 1961
Gail Vera	1897	China (?)	New York, 1947
Roy Eugene	February 1899	Wash. DC	Riverside, 1971



ton's National Circus as the famed equestrienne, Mdlle. La Rosiere. She was one of the few lady riders who could execute the difficult and strenuous bounding jockey act to perfection.<sup>12</sup> For a time, Jennie was married to Harry Cowle, Burton's agent.

Mdlle. La Rosiere imparted something of her equestrienne skill to her young daughter, Vernon Ida, who performed under her own make-believe name as Miss Ida Vernon. An exhibition of *pas de deux* with the young Walter St. Leon in Burton's Circus in Hobart in March 1873 is the first known reference to a performance by the young Ida. As they galloped around the ring, he posed her in various perilous positions, ultimately holding her at arm's length from him. She performed with great finish, and was described as a very attractive and graceful young lady.<sup>13</sup>

It was during a tour of Queensland that the renowned Mdlle. La Rosiere, Jennie Cousins Bumpuss, married William Woodyear, Burton's advance agent, in Brisbane on 10 June 1879. It was not to be her last marriage, but it certainly seems to have been her most successful match, and was only brought to an end by Woodyear's sudden death in India many years later.<sup>14</sup>

The absence of mention of Jennie's eldest daughter, Vernon Ida, throughout the several years after her *pas de deux* appearance with Walter Ernest in Hobart in 1873 is left unexplained. Judging by the examples of Vernon Ida's meticulous handwriting that survive, it could be safely presumed that she was receiving an education of a high standard, a standard that was unlikely to be found travelling on the road with a circus.

Vernon Ida St. Leon, nee Cousins, (1862-1935) circus rider and wife of Alfred St. Leon. Russell Ward collection.

Burton's Great Australian Circus returned to Sydney, opening its final season on 30 August 1879, during the International Exhibition. Business was not good for Burton for Sydney was overrun with amusements during the Intercolonial Exhibition at the Palace Gardens. During this season, Mdlle. La Rosiere's own riding career came to an end when her horse shied and she was thrown with fearful force against a stanchion, breaking four ribs and sustaining other injuries.<sup>15</sup>



Early in 1880, in the wake of Burton's insolvency, his circus was taken over by the Woodyears. They re-organised the show and re-opened in Sydney in March 1880 as the Great Australian Circus.<sup>16</sup>

Eventually, Vernon Ida returned to the sawdust ring as a fine bareback rider. She made her first known appearance with her mother and stepfather's circus at Wagga Wagga on 27 December 1880. By then she was almost eighteen years of age. The bills stated that Miss Ida Vernon, the "charming equestrienne," had been engaged "at an enormous salary."<sup>17</sup> A few months later, the Woodyear circus crossed paths with the St. Leon company at Hay, NSW, which marked the beginning of the courtship between the spritely Vernon Ida and the dashing Eugene Alfred St. Leon.

When Alfred's older brother Walter gave away somersault work to concentrate on his own skills, only the "graceful and daring" Alfred performed the equestrian somersault act in the St. Leon circus thereafter. This he performed "in splendid style."<sup>18</sup> A sharp crack of the ringmaster's whip, a cry of "Hoop La! Hoop La! Allez! Allez!" and into the St. Leon circus ring would dart the young Alfred. He gracefully posed on his prancing, snorting steed to the wonderment of the onlookers, and the intense admiration of Banvard the clown who, with his hands in unfathomably deep pockets, and glaring, staring eyes, followed Alfred's every movement. Alfred executed as many as six back somersaults on horseback around the ring of the St. Leon circus. On one occasion Alfred reportedly drove "a splendid team of eight grey and piebald steeds," and began laying plans to drive a team of fourteen horses, although it is not known whether these plans materialised.<sup>19</sup>

By 1885 the St. Leon show had grown so big that it was divided in two and the two most show-happy brothers, Gus and Alfred, toured their portion with great success through New Zealand. The family's circus activities were fragmented for a few years thereafter, and when Gus and Alfred closed up their show in Melbourne early in 1888, Alfred and his family drifted from one circus to another.

We do not pick up the thread of Alfred's family's activities with any certainty again until early

1894, by which time they had joined the small circus of Charles "Jubilee" Perry. This Perry company appeared in Moruya, on the south coast of New South Wales, during January 1894 and then camped a mile or two out of town, during which time they completely renovated their whole turn out and rehearsed some new horses and several entirely new acts.<sup>20</sup> Alf and his young family were still with Perry's Circus that April, but within a few months had joined the circus of Abell and Klaer, a show that had recently arrived from India.

After landing at some port in North Queensland, possibly Townsville or Rockhampton, Abell & Klaer's worked its way down the east coast of Australia to Sydney and then overland to Melbourne. Alfred and his family joined up with Abell & Klaer along the way.

Abell & Klaer's Circus opened in Sydney on the evening of 29 September 1894 to an enthusiastic reception. The lengthy program was gone through in a quick,

Program for Madame Woodyear's Electric Circus, Sydney 1886. Russell Ward collection.

**MADAME WOODYEAR'S**

**Electric Circus**

AND GREAT

**LONDON EQUESQUIRICULUM,**

BELMORE PARK, SYDNEY.

*Under the Patronage and in the Presence of*

**His Excellency the Governor Lord Carrington**

**LADY CARRINGTON & SUITE.**

**THURSDAY EVE., JANUARY 14th., 1886.**

**PROGRAMME.**

Overture at 8 o'clock

1. Chinese Entree, Stick Dance and Pyramids ...
2. Scenic Act ... BUNGERO AND ITCHI
3. Equestrianism ... MASTER FRANCIS
- Clown—CUSKO.
4. Perche Equivoise ... Messrs. WALLACE AND KING
5. "Duke Bambini," The Fire Pony
- Introduced by ROBERT TAYLOR
6. Comic Hats ... CUSKO AND J. KITCHI
7. Le Voltigeur ... VICTOR COOKE
8. BUNGERO AND ITCHI, The Japanese Wonders
9. Trick Horse, "Hector," introduced by Mr. WOODYEAR
10. Duplicate Ladders ... CULVERT AND COMPANY
11. Juggling on the Running Globe ... ROBERT TAYLOR
12. Five Horse Picture Act ... VICTOR COOKE

TO CONCLUDE WITH THE LAUGHABLE EQUESTRIAN SCENE,  
ENTITLED,

**Sir William Button's Ride to Bradford**

Introducing the Bucking Pony FOSCO, and Kicking Mare  
GREY DOBIN.

Equestrian Director, ROBERT TAYLOR.  
General Agent, ROBERT LOVE.



smart style to the accompaniment of a good string orchestra. Whether it was Alfred St. Leon in his somersault equestrian act, the hilarious antics of the clown Benham, or the many other fine performers on the bill, the audience was kept on the edge of its seats throughout the evening. At a high point in the program's second half, Johnny and Dezeppo Zinga<sup>21</sup> gave their turn on the revolving ladder to much applause.

A few weeks later, Abell & Klaer's Circus opened in Melbourne, the city known among showmen as the "boss show place" of the colonies. The largest and most influential of the Australian colonial capitals, the mettle of show business entrepreneurs was tested by a public more affluent and more discriminating than any other in the colonies. Despite the success Abell & Klaer had enjoyed in India and during their progress down the eastern seaboard of Australia, the showmen were forced to fold their tents only a few weeks after their opening in Melbourne.

Within a few months, many of the performers of Abell & Klaer's old circus became the nucleus of yet another new circus, the Pacific Circus of Harry Wirth, one of the Wirth brothers, who had decided to strike out on his own. It was mostly just Abell & Klaer's Circus under a new name, and included Alf St. Leon and his family.

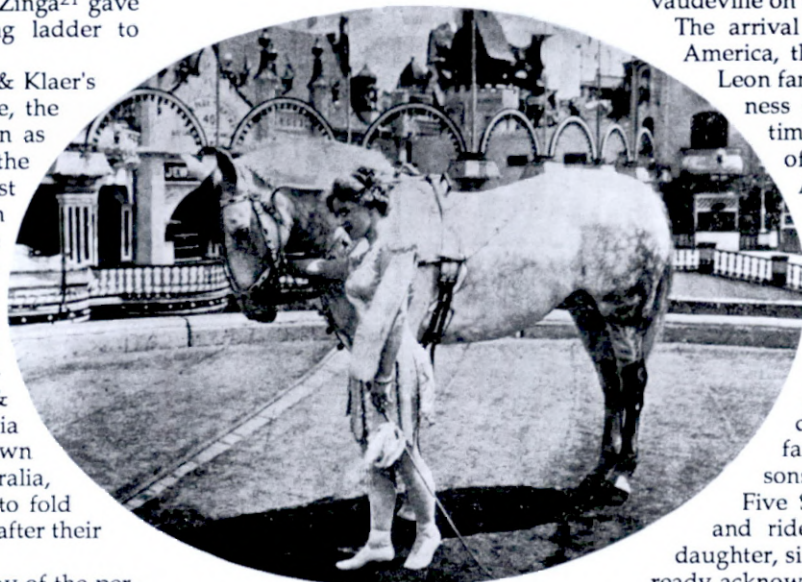
Wirth's Pacific Circus opened its Sydney season on 22 May 1895 before departing Australia's shores for an abortive tour of the Far East. Alf and Ida St. Leon intended returning to Australia eventually. Their eldest daughter, Golda, was left behind in Melbourne for some years, apparently to complete her education.

Harry Wirth charted the steamer *Katoomba* for its voyage to New Caledonia. From there the company shipped for the Fiji Islands and thence Hawaii. In the Far East the circus was caught in typhoons, was blown away, and did awful business. The company was heavily in debt by the time it visited the sea ports of China. In Shanghai, Wirth was stricken with sunstroke. The steamer conveying the circus was to leave Shanghai for Hong Kong that night but Wirth would not stay behind to convalesce. The ship's captain altered course for the port of Amoy to call a doctor but the gesture was too late. After several fits of delirium he died at quarter past five on 19 July 1896. The following day the ship pulled into Kong Kong and that same evening Wirth was buried.<sup>22</sup>

Harry Wirth's widow carried on with the show for a time but eventually failed. Alf St. Leon and his family continued

their wanderings throughout the Far East. They might have travelled for a time with Harmston's Circus.

Alf and his family joined at some point the circus of Bert Willison, during Willison's tour of China. From China a tour of Japan was undertaken and the last per-



Elsie St. Leon at Luna Park, Coney Island, New York. From *Variety*, 20 June 1908. Courtesy New York Public Library.

formance in Japan was apparently given in the Imperial Gardens at Kyoto. The show was then shipped from Yokohama to Honolulu.<sup>23</sup> From Honolulu, Willison intended to sail for Fiji and thence Australia.

From Honolulu, under date of 1 May 1898, Willison wrote to the *New York Clipper* to report on the progress of his show:

We have just finished a highly successful tour of the Hawaiian Islands, visiting towns where the name "circus" had never been heard of. Transportation has been the great difficulty experienced, but the plantation managers have assisted where transport companies failed to connect. . . . We have just returned to Honolulu in time to get the war news and the downfall of the Klondike [sic]. . . . Nearly all the performers are Australians and have been away from their native land quite a few years, and are looking forward to their return with glad hearts. . . . We remain here until May 11 when we sail for the Fiji Islands, en route to Australia, the land of the "golden fleece."<sup>24</sup>

But evidently there was a change of plans as the show proceeded, not to Aus-

tralia, but to Vancouver and the United States. The Alf St. Leon family was apparently in the United States by late 1898, although first definite mention of the family in American circus does not appear until two years later. When the family first came to the United States, they apparently presented their acrobatic act on vaudeville on the Orpheum circuit.<sup>25</sup>

The arrival of Alf and his family in America, the first members of the St. Leon family to reach the show business mecca of the world, was timely. The first decade or so of the 20th century saw the American circus at its zenith.

With W. H. Harris Nickel Plate Shows in Chicago in 1900, the Alfred St. Leon family made their first known circus engagement in the United States as "The Australian Wonders."<sup>26</sup> With Harris, the family completed two seasons, billed most often as the Five St. Leons, "acrobatic artists and riders." Alf and Ida's second daughter, sixteen year old Elsie, was already acknowledged as one of only three lady riders in all circus history who could throw somersaults upon a swiftly speeding bare back horse and "this fairylike queen of the arena" was the only lady somersault rider living.<sup>27</sup>

W. H. Harris was born in Cooksville Canada on 23 February 1841. In 1883 he began his career as a showman, establishing the Harris Nickel Plate Shows, which he conducted up to the time of his death.<sup>28</sup> Harris must have especially welcomed the Australians to his show for, back in 1886, he planned to go on to Australia after touring the gold country of the frontier American west. The proposed Australian tour, like many other forward-thinking circus plans, did not come off.

At the end of the 1897 circus season, James A. Bailey, a man who made few mistakes, made the biggest mistake of his career. He took Barnum & Bailey on a five year European tour, leaving his other shows, Buffalo Bill and Forepaugh-Sells, to hold Barnum & Bailey territory against the growing Ringling threat. Barnum & Bailey did not return to the United States until November 1902, by which time Ringling Bros. had achieved supremacy in the American circus.

It was in these circumstances that Alfred and his family signed up for two consecutive seasons, 1902 and 1903, with the Forepaugh-Sells circus. It opened its season of 1902 in Barnum & Bailey's traditional venue, New York's Madison Square Garden, on Wednesday evening, 2 April. The great feature of the Forepaugh-Sells



1902 program was Diavolo, the "loop the loop." The company also included luminaries of the American circus such as Oscar Lowande, Martino Lowande, Linda Jeal, Ouika Meares and Emma Stickney. All together, there were 183 performers engaged on the show.<sup>29</sup> From New York, the Adam Forepaugh and Sells Brothers Enormous Shows United Shows headed off by rail on their 1902 tour of the United States.

"Yet another consignment of one of the greatest creations in Arenic Art by La Belle France," the five St. Leons were billed before an unsuspecting American public. They were *acrobates extraordinaires* and the "prides of Paris." The programs proclaimed them "unquestionably the handsomest acrobats in the world. They augment their perfection of face and form with the most elaborate costumings ever seen in the arena. Their feats of strength, agility and general proficiency in athletic and acrobatic work places them easily at the head of the most pleasing performers of their class that Europe has sent to this country. They are the *beau ideals* of polite performers."<sup>30</sup>

As for the remarkable Elsie, she was sometimes billed as "Claire" St. Leon, the "loveliest daughter of France." Other times she was billed as La Belle Leona. She was one of a trio of "real champion lady hurdle riders" presented as Display No 6 in the three ring Forepaugh-Sells circus for its 1902 program, the other two being none other than Emma Stickney and Linda Jeal. Elsie turned her somersaults on a horse's bare back with as much ease as other girls of her age jumped off a cable car, while her jockey riding had never been surpassed in the number of tricks or in the daring of their execution.<sup>31</sup>

By the time James A. Bailey was divesting himself of the Forepaugh-Sells circus to the Ringlings, Alfred and his family had left. The activities of the Alfred St. Leon family during the circus season of 1904 have not been ascertained and we next find trace of Alfred and family with the circus of William P. Hall.

William P. Hall, a noted horse dealer of Lancaster, Missouri, had supplied several hundred horses for a re-enactment of the Boer War at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, one of the most popular and successful of the numerous outdoor exhibitions that was presented. His involvement in the World's Fair re-enactment, subsequently lead to the start of Hall's 28 year career in show business.

After the close of the World's Fair, the Boer War exhibition was taken into Lancaster at Hall's farm for the winter. In the fall of 1904, Hall also purchased the old Harris Nickel Plate Show, which had gone broke at Sebree, Kentucky, the first

of the many circuses that Hall acquired. Early in January 1905, Hall bought the 25 car Walter L. Main circus, acquiring all of the show except the baggage, stock, elephants and title. The equipment was shipped to Lancaster on 4 April 1905.

Hall used the Main equipment and his own horses and elephants to form his own circus, which was advertised as the Great William P. Hall Shows. It opened on 6 May 1905 in Lancaster, after which



This drawing of the "Five St. Leons, America's premier acrobats," appeared in the 1905 William P. Hall Circus herald. Pfening Archives.

it went on tour as a rail show. On the Sunday previous to the opening, Hall waited until church services were over before testing the circus calliope on the town's showground. He sent his team of six beautifully spotted horses over to the showground as well, hitching them to the calliope wagon in order to allow the team to become accustomed to strange noises emanating from the shrieking instrument.

His circus gave a very fine performance the following evening, the company of performers including Alf St. Leon's family of acrobats with Elsie as four horse rider, billed as La Belle Leona as she had been with Forepaugh-Sells. The Hall show was apparently a two ring circus, with a stage placed between the two rings.<sup>32</sup>

The show moved into Iowa and Illinois and then swung back into Missouri, Hall's home state. The show met with success all the way. At least a report submitted to the *Clipper* said so:

We are still doing good business, and from all appearances, will continue in the same way. . . . The acts put on by the St. Leon family of acrobats, and which is the feature of the Hall programme, is a great drawing card to bring forth great

applause from the audience. It certainly deserves great credit for wonderful achievement in this line of work.<sup>33</sup>

The show then headed into the Oklahoma Indian Territory and Kansas. The St. Leons were listed on the Hall program as "Australian acrobats," one of the very few occasions that the family ever referred to their Antipodian origins in American show business.<sup>34</sup>

From Iowa, the William P. Hall show returned to Missouri to close where it began, in Lancaster, on 30 August 1905. Although the show reported good business early in the season, receipts tapered off as the tour progressed. The show train was involved in a wreck, the tent was blown down at least twice, and the stock was difficult to control. Back in Lancaster, it was announced that the show had been compelled to close its season on account of the yellow fever epidemic that had broken out in the South. In fact, the relatively early closing indicated that the inaugural season had been a dismal failure. The 1905 tenting season was a poor one for circuses and travelling shows generally, especially in the central states, because of crop failure. The Great William P. Hall Show never trouped again, although Hall remained active in show business until his death in 1932.

We next pick up the trail of the Alfred St. Leon family when they were engaged to tour Cuba during the winter of 1905-6 with the circus of the popular showman, Antonio Cubillones.

Called the "Barnum of Cuba," Cubillones had presented his circus to the Cuban public each year since 1872. His circus opened each winter in Havana and a number of performers were engaged for each season from the United States as special attractions. The St. Leons sailed from New York for Havana and gave their debut at the National Theatre on Friday 9 November 1905.<sup>35</sup> The name and popularity of the "San Leons" (as the Cubans called the family), the equestrians and acrobats who had performed in New York's Great Hippodrome Circus, preceded them.

Ben E. Wallace ran one of the more notorious grift shows. A common practice was for his circus to hire teams of professional pickpockets to work the crowds. Another was to construct a high ticket wagon with a window above eye level so that the patron could not see his change being miscounted. It was in such unfortunate surroundings that Alfred and his family found themselves employed for the American circus season of 1906.

The Great Wallace Show inaugurated its 23rd season at its winter quarters, in Peru, Indiana, 21 April, and Miami County took a holiday for the occasion.



Ideal weather conditions favoured the opening, the attendance at two performances taxing the capacity of the big top. Forty cars made up in three special trains were used to transport the circus.

The side show, lavishly equipped and comprising 45 performers, was a special feature of the show that season. Big show performers included the Stickneys, Alec Lowande, Camille Stirk and some Japanese performers.<sup>36</sup>

Alf must have got "into the money over in the U.S.A.," as he was always sending cash back to Golda. Her ship left from Melbourne and arrived in San Francisco about the time of the great earthquake. Despite her absence from circus life for some years, not to mention her 24 summers, Golda appears to have joined the family act for a short time.

Golda may have accompanied the family on its second visit to Cuba during the winter of 1906-7, as contemporary reports speak of the "five young ladies" in the St. Leon troupe.<sup>37</sup>

The variety of the St. Leons' repertoire did not pass by the Havana press unnoticed, especially Elsie, "the only equestrian lady in the world who does somersaults riding a horse bareback." The remainder of the family acts comprised an acrobatic act, a double trapeze trick, and an act of two horses guided by "two beautiful young ladies" dressed in costumes probably ornamented with electric lights, which were of great effect.<sup>38</sup>

On their return to the United States, an engagement with Forepaugh-Sells, by then under Ringling ownership, awaited Alfred and his family.

James A. Bailey died on 22 March 1906 and his entire circus organisation, including the Barnum and Bailey and Forepaugh-Sells circuses, were purchased by the Ringling Bros. It was therefore as a part of the burgeoning Ringling empire with which Alfred and his family found themselves employed when they joined Forepaugh-Sells for the season of 1907.

Elsie St. Leon did some "pretty work" on horseback on Forepaugh-Sells that year. Other members of the family put together a wirewalking act, a clever routine with the popular cakewalk as a finish. By this time, Elsie was well up among America's principal female circus riders. She possessed a gorgeous wardrobe and her riding was unusually graceful. Her act came to an end with a series of clean backward somersaults on the back of her moving horse. The St. Leon women were among the best acrobats in the tented world and their tumbling was an im-

portant part of their circus work. Ida used to sell her photographs around on the circus "blues" after she had done her act in the ring.<sup>39</sup>

At the close of the 1907 Forepaugh-Sells season the family returned to New York where they were engaged by the producer and entrepreneur, Frederic Thompson, for his dramatic production, *Polly of the Circus*. The story of *Polly* required the execution of circus tricks on the stage, especially in the closing act. Thompson had first made the acquaintance of Alfred



The 1906 Great Wallace herald contained this drawing of the "Wonderful St. Leon family of 8." Pfening Archives.

and his family when they appeared under his management at the New York Hippodrome. Alf negotiated an indefinite contract with Thompson that kept the St. Leon act continually engaged for several years.<sup>40</sup>

Frederic Thompson's first entrepreneurial success was his 1906 production of *Brewster's Millions* and, from the fortune he made, he designed and built Luna Park on New York's Coney Island, the first big summer amusement park of its kind in the world.<sup>41</sup>

*Polly of the Circus* had its initial performance in Washington on 10 December 1907. Two weeks later the show opened at the Liberty Theatre, New York.<sup>42</sup> The play, a comedy drama that comprised three acts and two tableaux, was the work of the playwright, Margaret Mayo. The leading part actress for the play's first season was a twenty-year-old Mabel Taliaferro, Thompson's wife and one of America's leading actresses.

The central figure of *Polly of the Circus*, a young circus rider, was injured by a fall from her horse while the show was in a small mid-western town. She was left at the parsonage opposite the circus lot, in the care of a young bachelor minister, to recover. By the time she familiarized herself with the staid community that was

now her home, the young minister had become the most promising of her hopes for the future. He in turn had found the fascination of the uneducated circus sprite, intelligent and pure-hearted, irresistible. In order to save the minister the disgrace of his parishioners and learning that her circus is in a neighbouring township, Polly fled the parsonage and returned to the show to take her regular place in the program. He takes her from the ring in the very midst of the performance. The curtain fell upon the pair standing upon the deserted circus lot in a final happy union, watching the twinkling lights of the big animal wagons as they disappeared into the distance.

Elsie St. Leon as the "Queen of Equestriennes" and "The Famous St. Leon Family of European Acrobats" executed the circus sketches throughout the play. The play's climax came toward the end of its three acts with a 45 second explosion of circus activity in a ring set up on the stage that featured the St. Leons leaping on and off their steeds as they loped around the make-believe circus arena. The short circus scene cost Thompson over \$1,600 a week and was perhaps the most striking example of the costly penchant for "atmosphere" then prevalent on the American stage.<sup>43</sup>

On Saturday, 18 May 1908, after their first season with *Polly of the Circus*, the family opened its engagement at another Thompson enterprise, the free outdoor circus at Luna Park on Coney Island. The Luna Park opening was the first time either the family or its horses had worked in the open but everything went off smoothly. *Variety* said that Elsie St. Leon "is claimed to be the only female bareback rider who has ever accomplished the feat of throwing a somersault, unassisted, while riding bareback."<sup>44</sup> The claim brought a swift response from one New York reader, William F. La Rue, who wrote to *Variety's* editor, saying:

This is a misapprehension. Other female riders in the United States have accomplished the feat mentioned. Among the number are Annie Morrison (riding under the name of Annie Cook); Little Edna, of the Lemon Brothers' show; Robinson Big Ten and Norris & Rowe; and Dolly Julia, last season with the Barnum show.

The subject of the unassisted female equestrian somersault provoked some further heated exchanges of opinion through the editorial columns of *Variety*. Alf St. Leon retorted:



In answer to Mr. W. F. La Rue, I wish to say I am aware my daughter Elsie St. Leon is not the first woman to throw somersaults on a bareback horse, but Mr. La Rue overlooked the word *unassisted* in the article referred to. . . . I maintain my daughter is the only woman who throws somersaults on a bareback horse without the assistance of man or human mechanics, either inside or outside the ring.

Josie De Mott, possibly the first woman anywhere to turn a somersault while riding bareback, had her say next, claiming that it made no difference whether the ring "be pillowed with flowers, feathers or human beings" for a female rider to turn her somersault safely. Her assertion also drew a swift rebuke from Alf in a further letter to *Variety*:

We'll leave the feathers there, they may be useful but take away the human beings and that makes all the difference. They may be of no assistance when the rider is starting a somersault, but they are very useful when she is coming down to help place or prevent a fall. I have seen all the lady somersault riders in this country for the past seven years who have appeared in public. I never as yet have seen one turn a somersault without being well guarded by men around the ring. I am not claiming any championship honours for my daughter, Elsie St. Leon. I say she is the first in America to do somersaults without a bodyguard or human mechanics stationed around the ring. Therefore her somersault is unassisted.

Alf appears to have made his point strongly enough, as no further correspondence ensued on the matter in *Variety's* columns.

Before the 1908 summer season at Luna Park was over the St. Leon family presented another rider in one of Elsie's younger sisters, Ida Jeannie. Until that time, Ida was more familiar to patrons performing as a tightwire walker, parasol in hand. For a time, Ida and Elsie, appeared in a double jockey and hurdle act. The sisters resembled each other so closely that it became necessary for each to wear a different coloured ribbon in order that Alf, who acted as their ringmaster, could distinguish the girls while they performed.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the summer, Elsie practised her live equestrian part for *Polly of the Circus* in the circus ring at Luna Park, beneath the Shoot the Chutes and the Scenic Railway. So much attention did Elsie, dressed in tights, attract that it was arranged for her to practice her part on the stage of a New York theatre.<sup>46</sup>

When Ida was not performing on the stage in *Polly*, she used to hang around the wings absorbing the stage atmosphere and could soon could recite every line of the play as Margaret Mayo had written it. Eventually, Ida's familiarity with the lines and her natural ability as an actress convinced both Taliaferro and Frederic Thompson that Ida was capable of play-



The Alfred St. Leon family in 1907. Left to right, Ida Jeannie, Mrs. Alf St. Leon, Alfred St. Leon, Alf St. Leon, Sr., Gail Vera, Golda and Elsie St. Leon. Pfening Archives.

ing the part, and it was offered her when Taliaferro decided to appear in another piece. After eight months of tuition by Taliaferro, Ida was ready to step properly into the role of the stage circus girl, a case almost unparalleled in the theatre.<sup>47</sup>

Alfred St. Leon did not live to see Ida's success on the stage. Late in 1908, Alf was stricken in a vaudeville house at Albany, New York, seriously ill with pulmonary tuberculosis. He was taken to a sanatorium at Rutland, Massachusetts to recuperate but on Sunday, 14 February 1909, the Australian circus man died. *Variety* said that Alf "was highly respected among show people and a gentleman of the old school," one of the best known of circus men who ever stood in a ring.<sup>48</sup> Ida had Alf's body brought to New York for burial in the exclusive Maple Grove Cemetery, at Richmond Hill, Long Island.

The St. Leon family appeared at Thompson's Luna Park for the summer of 1909. The park opened on Saturday, 15

May with the usual fanfare. A parade began the festivities and when the gates were opened, everybody had their dimes ready to hand to the lady charioteer money takers, in exchange for tickets. Again Elsie was the featured rider at the outdoor circus. Ida appeared with the family as a tightwire performer for a time, giving two performances a day but soon she commenced rehearsals for the leading role in *Polly of the Circus* on the stage of the Aerial Theatre. After each rehearsal, Ida hurried back to Luna Park where she gave her wirewalking exhibition each afternoon and evening.<sup>49</sup>

So successful had been *Polly of the Circus* that for this season, its third (1909-10), Thompson sent out on tour a second *Polly* company with Edith Taliaferro, Mabel's sister, in the title role. The circus artists used in support of this second company included the Seabert sisters, riders, one of whom, Lillian G. Savoin, later married George St. Leon.

But it was at the head of the original Broadway company that Ida was to be placed. Ida and the company opened their ten month's tour at the Casino Theatre, Ashbury Park, on 29 June. In the role of *Polly*, Ida not only proved to be a

great success but her career as one of America's leading actresses was launched.

Ida also took part in the play's circus acts, riding "almost as well" as her sister Elsie. As well, she walked the tightwire on the stage, talked the argot of the circus and played the part of *Polly*, all with equal felicity. She even made one of her stage entrances standing on the back of her beautiful white horse, Bingo II, instead of having to lead the animal in, as Mabel Taliaferro had to do.<sup>50</sup>

As an example of the circus jargon that Ida had to speak in the course of the play, here is a sample of the dialogue that occurs between *Polly* and the minister when she meets the clergyman:

"Great Barnum & Bailey! You a sky pilot! Well, I never thought I was talking to one of you guys. How long have you worked here?" she asks.

"I've only been here about six months."

"Six months! Haven't they got mighty tired of your spiel?"

"I hope they haven't."

"Gee! Six months in a burg like this. They must be sick of you or



you change your act. Do you do the same stuff all the time, or have you a rep?"

"A rep?" queries the puzzled sky pilot.

"Sure, repertory. Different act-entries some call them. Why, Uncle Toby--he's our clown--has got twenty entries."

"I see. Well, I try to say something new every Sunday."

"None of your acts is like circus acts, are they? Is there any laughs in your acts?"

"Not many laughs I am afraid. But ministers try to tell their people things which help them and make them forget their week-day troubles for a time."

"Why, that's just like the circus business--only circuses draw more people than the churches."<sup>51</sup>

Upon the company's return to New York in the spring of 1911, Ida attended acting classes while the rest of her family appeared at Coney Island.

Ida established an enviable record for one so youthful in *Polly of the Circus* but after more than two years of playing Polly, she had grown more into an actress and further from being a child of the circus. Her ability to carry the finer parts of the play improved wonderfully and by the end of the 1912 season, after three consecutive seasons in the title role of *Polly*, Ida was ready to move on to bigger things as the star in *Finishing Fanny*, a new play by Lee Wilson Dodd. Ida had invited her circus friends to attend her debut as the star of *Finishing Fanny*, and twenty circus folk accompanied her when she left New York for Harrisburg two days before the play's opening. Meanwhile, Ida's older sister, Elsie was groomed to take over the title role in *Polly*.<sup>52</sup>

In 1914, by which time Ida's career as an actress had been firmly established, she told the *Billboard*:

I love the circus and I like the stage. . . . But oh! those muddy lots and those long parades and the cold dressing tents which we used to have down South in the fall. On the stage it is different, for instance the star's dressing room, so nice and warm, with a private bath nearby. . . . But I like the people of the circus better than I do the people of the stage. . . . I love to hear the band play good old circus music, *Happy Heiney, Thunder and Blazes*, and somehow, nowhere else does it sound so nice and sweet as under the big, broad expanse of canvas. You see, with the circus, everybody is happy. . . . Professional jealousy, nothing like that at all. You never

see anybody flashing a rusty old contract. And with the circus nobody ever needs an introduction. Why last year I was a star in a show and it was nearly Christmas before some of the folks in the company appeared sociable.<sup>53</sup>

With fifty of their most intimate friends present in a flower-decked ballroom of the Engstrum apartments, Ida J. St. Leon and Leo M. Rosenberg, president of the



Elsie and Ida Jeannie St. Leon, double equestrian act, at Luna Park, Coney Island. From *Variety* August 15 1908. Courtesy New York Public Library.

Hippolite Screen and Sash Company, were married at 8.30 on the evening of 14 January 1917. The bride was attended only by her mother, while Herman Rosenberg, a brother of the groom, gave her away. Ida declared after the ceremony that she had left the stage, and presumably the circus, for good.

Mrs. Alf St. Leon had died at the Rosenberg home in Los Angeles on 18 October 1935, and was interred at Forest Lawn Cemetery, Glendale, California.<sup>54</sup>

George and Elsie continued to appear at the Luna Park outdoor circus, between the *Polly* seasons, as an acrobatic and equestrian duo each summer for the years 1910, 1911 and 1913. George, Elsie and their respective steeds were featured on the front cover of *Billboard* on 6 August 1910. May Wirth had not yet arrived in the U. S. when *Variety* described Elsie as being a daring, pretty and graceful equestrienne with no peer among women in the circus ring. She was "as lithe as a fawn, as graceful as a genie," whether riding or standing upon a bareback prancing horse. George and Elsie were joined in 1910 by their younger sister, Vera, who performed her double act, a wire act with her star

single riding speciality. She reappeared with George and Elsie in a double riding act.<sup>55</sup>

When the *Polly of the Circus* show took to the road, on Stair and Havlin time and under the management of Wise and Moxon, for its sixth consecutive season, late in 1912, it was Elsie who played the title role. Vera and George were engaged for the circus sequences. Although a newcomer to a dramatic role on the stage, Elsie suffered nothing in comparison with her talented sister, Ida. And an audience could believe that Elsie was a circus rider when she threw a few back somersaults with nonchalant ease for the delectation of the circus children in the second act.

Their jaunt with their 1912-13 season of *Polly of the Circus* took Elsie, Vera and George into Canada in February 1913.

By the season of 1913-14, the story of *Polly of the Circus* was beginning to wane on either the company or their audience or both. Although Elsie played the part of Polly "acceptably," the whole production had become rather a "shabby reminiscence of the glory" that once belonged to *Polly*. The circus folks were the best of the play, capable of creating the impression of reality but "palpably saccharine" was the performance given by George F. Harris as the parson.<sup>56</sup>

Frederic Thompson's entrepreneurial ventures did not end with amusement parks and dramatic productions. In 1913 he directed *The Whimsical Threads of Destiny*, a two reel silent film that was made by the Vitagraph company, an elaborate film that would use the gifts of the St. Leon family to their best advantage.

The story line of this silent film comprised an eccentric old millionaire, Giles Webster, who decides to test the character of his two heirs, his distant niece and his distant nephew. The film included action circus scenes by the St. Leons. The *Moving Picture World* said that the two equestrienne sisters, Elsie and Vera St Leon, were among the real attractions in this "delightful" Vitagraph film.

Although the reels of *The Whimsical Threads of Destiny* may have long since disappeared, the film reached Australia. It was shown at FitzGerald's Picture Palace at Bourke, NSW in 1914.<sup>57</sup>

Probably on the strength of their popularity in the *Polly of the Circus* company and their work at Luna Park, Elsie, George and Vera, were engaged by John Ringling as the center ring riding attraction for the 1914 season of Barnum and Bailey.

The trio and their mother stayed at the Hotel St. Margaret at 127 47th Street in the month or so leading up to the 21 March 1914 opening to rehearse their act. But, on the Saturday morning previous to



the opening at Madison Square Garden, Vera suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, leaving the family a note in which she threatened to commit suicide. She was last seen going that Saturday morning to a little dry goods store on the corner of 6th Avenue and 47th Street. Elsie and George told John Ringling that they did not think they could work under the circumstances. But Ringling was confident Vera would return and told them to go ahead and do the best they could until a substitute act could be arranged.

Although they gave the centre ring equestrian presentation, Elsie and George were outshone by the riding acts presented in the outer two rings, the Davenport in one, and Ella Bradna and Fred Derrick in the other. But their bareback performance, a part of Display No. 15 on the program, was noticeable for its grace, dexterity and attraction. Although they performed no startling feats their routine was well selected.<sup>58</sup>

Diligent inquiry and a daily notice in the New York papers failed to locate any news of Vera. Elsie and George feared she might have met with foul play. The missing girl was known for her modest, unassuming manner, being of a quiet disposition and very devoted to her mother and sisters. Owing to her continued absence, the St. Leons did not do any further circus work that summer but instead signed to play next season with Moxon and Weis' production of *Polly of the Circus*.<sup>59</sup>

Before that year was out, George St. Leon had brought out the interest of Clarence Weis, and he and William Moxon continued to tour the production as before. The *Polly* show moved into the southern states for the winter. But Elsie and George abandoned the company by the season's end. They began making appearances on vaudeville on the west coast, assisted by John Gilbert, their acrobatic ringmaster. In 1917, George and Elsie appeared at the Fifth Avenue, a New York theatre, during the United War Work Drive when a special program was staged to raise money.

The Wies-Moxon engagement was the last time that the St. Leon family toured with *Polly of the Circus*, although other productions of the play continued to tour. In 1917 the play was made into a silent film by Sam Goldwyn, starring Mae Marsh and Vernon Steele. The film was an "innocuous, eight reel romance that was not a box-office success" although it initiated Samuel Goldwyn's legendary forty year career as one of Hollywood's leading producers.<sup>60</sup>

A surprise was in store for the family in 1917 when, after missing for three years, Vera returned to the family circle of her

own accord. It was soon learnt that she never left New York, but had left show business.<sup>61</sup>

George married Lillian G. Savoin, one of the Seabert Sisters and they performed Bostock's Riding School on the Keith and Orpheum vaudeville circuit in partnership with J. Gordon Bostock.

The Bostock act, featuring George and Lillian, was a popular one on American vaudeville throughout the 1920s. The Bostock Riding School was by 1925 divided into two turns, with George and Lillian as principals. In the first turn, Lillian did straight riding and pretty bareback work, assisted by the Maggioni brothers. The second turn was the hilarious Bostock act. The act carried five horses, and was a part of St. Leon's Mighty Indoor Circus and Animal Show, all under the directorship of George St. Leon.<sup>62</sup>

By 1929, George and Lillian had their own act on vaudeville, billed as Lillian St. Leon and Co. Their ten minute equestrian turn took up the full stage of the New York Coliseum. The act still comprised the riding school idea. Lillian was still a graceful and easy rider and George acted as ringmaster. The act was exclusively managed by the firm of Wirth & Hamid Inc., a partner of which was Phil St. Leon Wirth, a cousin of George. Lillian St. Leon and Company toured England, played fairs for Hamid and Wirth, and played more vaudeville.<sup>63</sup>

George appeared as a clown on Cole Bros. Circus during the 1930s. The Mary St. Leon who appeared in an equestrian act on the Cole Bros. Circus in 1935 with Agnes Doss may have been a daughter of George and Lillian.<sup>64</sup>

The Riding St. Leons were featured with Bays Bros. Circus during the summer of 1935. The big top had 6 poles and the 26 numbers on the program were given across three rings and two stages. At Terre Haute, Indiana, on 29 June, patrons were placed on straw at the first matinee performance, and it was necessary to give an extra matinee before the night show which was to a capacity house. George St. Leon was one of the members of the show's clown alley.<sup>65</sup>

We find George St. Leon as equestrian director and clown, and Lillian St. Leon performing her riding act, on the Walter L. Main Circus in 1936 and 1937.

Since its 1936 opening in South Carolina, the Walter L. Main Circus did splendid business. The weather was in the show's favour as it played many New York stands, and it gave as many as three shows a day to take care of the overflow crowds. The program, which was presented in three rings, also included Joe Hodgini and family, riders and clowns.<sup>66</sup>

The 1937 edition of the Walter L. Main



This photo of Elsie St. Leon appeared in the New York Standard on July 26, 1908. Courtesy New York Public Library.

Circus opened in early April at Montgomery, Alabama and headed straight north through that state, Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio before striking Pennsylvania. Lillian St. Leon, performed as a rider in act No. 9, while the St. Leon troupe, along with Howard Bryant, presented a riding act as act No. 14.<sup>67</sup>

Golda, who had followed a career as a nurse, died of leukemia in the Grace Hospital in Detroit, Michigan on 14 August 1939, and her remains were removed for

George and Elsie St. Leon appeared on the cover of the August 6 1910 *Billboard*. Courtesy New York Public Library.



THE ST. LEON ACTRESS AND EQUESTRIAN, AS A FEATURE AT LUNA PARK, CONEY ISLAND, N. Y.



burial in New York two days later. She was buried next to her father in the family plot in Maple Grove Cemetery. Gail Vera, whose married name appears to have been Hope, was also buried in the family plot when she died on 23 June 1947.

A photograph taken of Lillian at Wichita, Kansas on 15 November 1941 flanked by Caroline Hodgini and Theresa Morales evidences George and Lillian's association with Polack Bros. Circus at that time.

Polack Bros. Circus closed a successful eight day engagement in Los Angeles late in September 1941, with an estimated 105,000 people having attended the show staged under the auspices of Al Mal-aikah Shrine in the Shrine Auditorium. The show opened with a concert by Al Mal-aikah Temple's Shrine band, followed by the uniformed bodies of the Temple. Included on the program were St. Leon's police dogs, there was also mention of the St. Leon principal riding act, probably Lillian.<sup>68</sup>

For twelve years George and Lillian operated a commercial photography business in Detroit. It was in Detroit, in or about 1949, that George and Lillian met Clyde St. Leon, George's cousin, and his boys, Norman and Clyde Jr., as these other St. Leons were working at the Shrine Circus with their teeterboard act as the St. Leon Troupe. The younger Clyde recalled that:

Uncle George came to visit my father. His wife was with him and her name was Lillian. He was crippled badly and I remember my father saying he was injured while doing the riding act. . . . They carried themselves regally and, although they were not rich, they had class. The last that we heard from them was in California because George's health forced the move there.

Alfred George St. Leon died in a Los Angeles hospital on 10 August 1955, aged 65. He was buried in Glendale, California. His wife, Lillian, outlived him for many years, her name still being listed in the Pasadena telephone directory of 1976. Ida's death, at the age of 67, occurred in Los Angeles on 19 September 1961.<sup>69</sup> She was buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. It is understood that Elsie died in Los Angeles in 1967.

The family of Alfred St. Leon was one of the first migrations of Australian circus people to the United States, a traffic that has been underway ever since. The fami-

ly's association with the major circuses of Australia, the Far East, Latin America and the United States speaks volumes for its professional standing. Its professional activities encompassed drama, vaudeville and silent film, as well as the circus, a



The St. Leon riding act on the Barnum and Bailey Circus in 1914. Pfening Archives.

breadth of exposure that only a few of the finest circus artists have experienced.

It remains a source of regret to this writer that Alfred St. Leon's family had departed this world without leaving something of their undoubtedly rich and intimate memories of their circus lives. He should be only too happy to hear from anyone who can fill out the picture of the Alfred St. Leon and his family just a little more.

For this article, the author wishes to record special thanks to Russell Ward, a descendant of the Woodyear family for much valuable information. Tribute is also due to Fred Braid, MBE, Australia's assistance provided over the years by the staff of the Circus World Museum, and of the Billy Rose Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library.

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#### Footnotes

1. *Cornwall Chronicle*, 11 December 1847.
2. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 October 1850.
3. Alfred's birth was not registered as far as can be gathered. This date has been arrived from corroborative evidence and despite the fact that the year 1861 was given as his year of birth on his New York grave stone. For some peculiar reason I have found that nearly all of Alfred's family understated their ages by two years.
4. *Cowra Free Press*, 11 December 1878; *Geelong Advertiser*, 1 February 1879; *Coleraine Albion*, 9 February 1883.
5. *Brisbane Courier*, 19 August 1878.
6. *Maryborough & Dunolly Advertiser*, 10 February 1879; *Ballarat Courier*, 17 February 1879.
7. The marriage took place at Prahran, a suburb of Melbourne, on 22 October 1881, according to the marriage certificate issued by the Victorian Registrar-General.
8. *Launceston Examiner*, 2 February 1884.
9. *Geelong Advertiser*, 27 August 1855.
10. *Bendigo Advertiser*, 18 March 1865.
11. As recorded in "The Grand Union Circus," an article published in the *Town & Country Journal* of 11 July 1874; *Bell's Life in Victoria*, 21 July 1866; information in letter of Russell Ward, dated 10 September 1989.
12. Pattison, *op cit*.
13. *Hobart Mercury*, 4 March 1873.
14. Hayes, *op cit*.
15. *The Bulletin*, 13 September 1884.
16. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 March 1880.
17. *Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, 27 December 1875.
18. *Launceston Examiner*, 3 March 1881.
19. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 December 1883; *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 May 1883; *Hobart Mercury*, 11 February 1881.
20. *Moruya Examiner*, 26 January 1894.
21. These were, incidentally, the parents of the infant who would one day be known as May Wirth, the famous equestrienne. May was born at Bundaberg, Queensland a few months earlier when the Abell & Klaer circus visited the town on its way south.
22. These events were graphically described in a letter of Mrs. Alf St. Leon to Rill Wirth Martin to inform her of her brother Harry's death. The original letter, dated Hong Kong 30 July 1896, is now held by the Dennis Wolar Library of Performing Arts, Sydney Opera House.
23. The detail of the Willison show's movements was contained in a letter from one of Willison's daughter Adele, to the British Circus



historian, Anthony Hippisley Coxe, and included in his book *A Seat at the Circus*, page 39.

24. *New York Clipper*, 21 May 1898
25. *Sunday Tribune*, 27 February 1910.
26. *New York Clipper*, 31 March 1900.
27. *New York World*, 28 April 1901.
28. *New York Clipper*, 23 February 1901.
29. *Billboard*, 12 April 1902.
30. Courier from file in Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

31. 1903 courier from file in Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

32. Much of the anecdotal information in this section is drawn from the article William P. Hall, by Fred D. Pfening, III, which appeared in the spring edition of the *Missouri Historical Review*, the journal of the State Historical Society of Missouri. Program from the program file in the Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

33. *New York Clipper*, 15 July 1905.
34. *New York Clipper*, 17 June 1905.
35. A photograph of Pubillones appeared in the *New York Clipper* of 17 February 1912. His death was reported the *Clipper* of 29 May 1918; *Diario de la Maricao Marana*, 9 November 1905.

36. *Billboard*, 12 May 1906.

37. Evidently Mrs. Alfred St. Leon and her daughters, Ida, Golda, Elsie, Ida, and Vera. *Diario de la Mari Marana*, 9 November 1906.

38. *Diario de la Maricao Marana*, 9 November 1906.

39. *Variety*, 11 May 1907; *Variety*, 26 October 1907; *Billboard*, 19 December 1914.

40. *Variety*, 15 August 1908.

41. *New York Star*, 10 October 1908. Biographical details of Frederick W. Thompson are given in *Who Was Who in Theatre, 1912-1976*, Volume 4, Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company.

42. A good review of *Polly* of the Circus appeared in *The New York Times* of 24 December 1907.

43. *Chicago Journal*, 11 September 1908.
44. *Variety*, 23 May 1908.
45. *Variety*, 1 August 1908.
46. *Chicago Journal*, 11 September 1908.
47. From "Through a Star to Stardom," in *The Burr McIntosh*, September 1909.

48. *Billboard*, 19 December 1914; Massachusetts Death Return 1909, Vol. 83, Page 305, No. 13; *Variety*, 20 February 1909. *Variety*, 11 December 1909.

49. *New York Clipper*, 22 May 1909. *New York Telegraph*, 18 June 1909.

50. *Dramatic Herald*, 12 June 1909. Undated clipping from the Harvard Theatre Collection. *Toledo Blade*, 15 March 1910.

51. Unsourced clipping, 15 November 1912.
52. *Spokane Review*, 14 January 1912; *Variety*, 15 November 1912; *Atlanta Georgian*, 26 March 1912; *Variety*, 29 November 1912; *New York Telegram*, 23 November 1912.

53. *Billboard*, 19 December 1914.

54. *Los Angeles Times*, 15 January 1917; *Billboard*, 14 December 1935.

55. *Variety*, 10 December 1910; *Variety*, 21 May 1910.

56. *Variety*, 2 August 1913; *Variety*, 29 August 1913; *Atlanta Georgian*, 8 January 1914; *New York Clipper*, 15 February 1913; *Atlanta Georgian*, 8 January 1914.

57. *San Antonio Sight*, 23 November 1913; *The Moving Picture World*, 8 November 1913; *Western Herald*, 29 August 1914.

58. *Billboard*, 28 March 1914; *New York Clip-*

*per*, 28 March 1914.

59. *Variety*, 22 May 1914.

60. *Variety*, 19 December 1914; Frank N. Magill, *Magill's Survey of Cinema: Silent Films*, Volume 2, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Salem Press.

61. *Variety*, 27 July 1917.

62. *Variety*, 18 November 1925.

63. *Billboard* of 27 August 1955.

64. There is no certainty of this however. The "Mary" in question may have been the "daring

Mary Miller," who appeared with the Bays Bros. Circus, also in 1935, in the company of George St. Leon and the St. Leon riding acts. George's 1955 obituary and gravestone inscription give no suggestion that he left a daughter surviving him.

65. *Billboard*, 6 July 1935.

66. *Billboard*, 11 July 1936.

67. *Billboard*, 22 May 1937.

68. *Billboard*, 27 September 1941.

69. *Los Angeles Times*, 22 September 1961.

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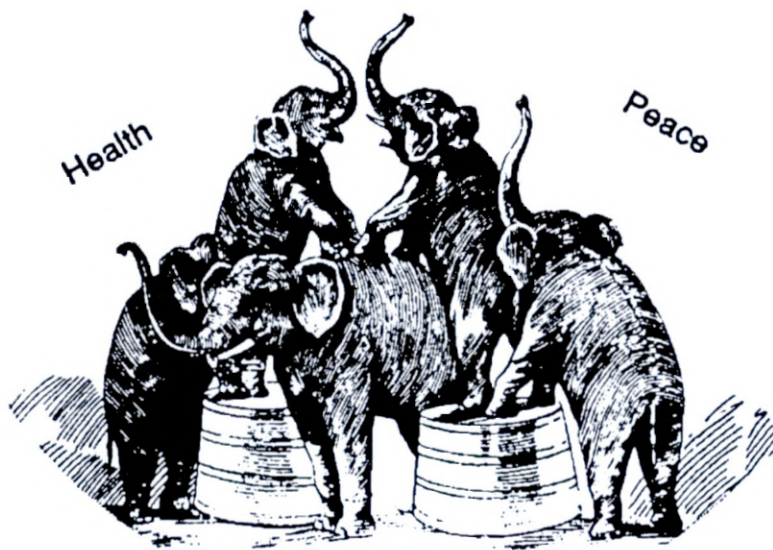


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TO ALL OUR CIRCUS FRIENDS WE PRAY FOR GOD'S BLESSINGS OF

VIDBEL'S OLD TYME  
**CIRCUS**



JOYCE

SUSAN

SHARON

&

JENNIFER

&

AL

SADIE

JACKIE



**I**t's hard to believe that the biggest circus picture ever made by Hollywood, Cecil B. DeMille's super-spectacular *The Greatest Show on Earth* (running time: 2 hours, 31 minutes), was filmed 40 years ago this year, when DeMille himself was a ripe 70 years-old and had already been directing and producing motion pictures in Hollywood for 39 years. This epic circus movie was, pardon the expression, the "mother" of previous circus pictures, the "grand dandy" of them all! Making the movie, however, was more hard work than fun and involved meticulous planning and herculean work efforts, over more than two years, by both the movie pros and circus legions.

Featured on celluloid along with some of Hollywood's biggest stars, was a stellar line-up of world class circus talent, 150 performers from 60 different acts that John Ringling North had assembled for his 1951 super circus show under a new \$100,000 big top tent. North's girlfriend at the time, Gloria Drew, even got into the act.

Veteran circus press agent Frank Braden, who was hired by Paramount Pictures to help publicize the film during production and later upon its theatrical release, assured well-known circus collector Karl Knecht in late December, 1951, that unlike previous circus films, *The Greatest Show on Earth* would capture circus life with a high degree of authenticity.

In a letter to Knecht, Braden wrote: "I have seen it; the 'first, last and only real circus picture.'" Braden added, "DeMille is a circus man! When you hear his voice now and then in the picture's dramatic, vital narration, you'll know how true that is."

Among the great and now legendary circus names were Albert Rix's bears, Roland Tiebor's seals, the Zoppes, center ring favorite Pinito Del Oro, aerialist La Norma (Norma Fox) and her husband, horseman Andre Fox, Charlie Moroski, wire walkers Lola Dobritch and Hubert Castle, The Flying Concellos (this was Antoinette Concello's final year as a regular flyer), Miss Loni, high wire sensation Harold Alzana, elephant trainer Eugene "Arky" Scott, and Gargantua II and Madame Toto. Dave Murphy was the show's announcer and a youthful Harold Ronk its vocalist.

The daily "nut" for this

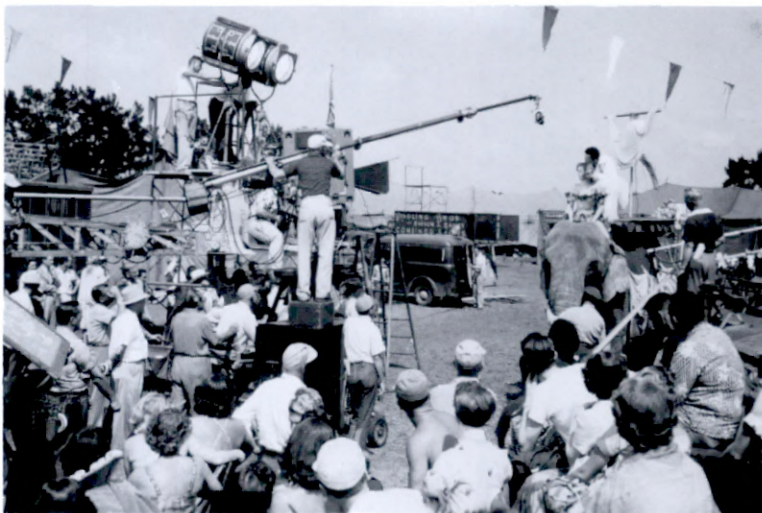
# Cecil B. DeMille's Greatest Show On Earth FILM EPIC 40 YEARS AGO BY JERRY DIGNEY

Ringling edition was reportedly \$25,000, although business throughout the season was uneven with many \$4,000 show days (in a little over a decade, railroad costs alone had nearly tripled in price). For DeMille's crew, filming costs would average \$20,000 a day while the cast was shooting on location.

Of DeMille, Henry Ringling North once wrote, "Of all the strange and wonderful people whom I knew in the circus at one time or another, one of the most extraordinary did not belong there at all. He was Cecil B. DeMille."

In his Ringling family history, *The Circus Kings*, North went on to describe a typical DeMille visit in preparation for the filming. "At every show, he mingled with the circus crowds as they poured in, listening and making notes. While the show was on he was running around

The Paramount film crew shooting a scene on March 12, 1951 at the Ringling-Barnum winter quarters. Pfening Archives.



the big top squinting through his finder to study camera angles. He was indefatigable and unpredictable." (DeMille would later claim that along with his circus movie he had also contributed something more to circus history, the invention of air flaps, strategically placed along the ridge of the big top for improved air circulation and cooler inside temperatures, which were introduced to the main Ringling show tent in 1951.)

On the set, he was often described as "mercurial" by cast and crew alike. His rantings, though, often successfully yielded the emotional result he sought in certain scenes.

John Murray Anderson, who had been staging, in a highly autocratic style that frequently harassed the circus cast, the show's productions since 1942 and who reportedly quit during the Madison Square Garden run in 1951 (some witnesses claim that Anderson, who never got along with circus manager Art Concello, was actually fired by the latter after the director kept showgirls aloft long past what the circus manager thought was necessary or safe during a production rehearsal in New York), wrote, along with composer Henry Sullivan, most of the production music for this circus edition. The notable exception is "Lovely Luawana Lady" which North himself composed along with lyricist Ray Goetz and which actress Dorothy Lamour sang in the picture. Other memorable production numbers were "Picnic in the Park" and "Popcorn and Lemonade."

Prior to departing the circus, the admittedly sarcastic Anderson—who after challenging DeMille's contract with Ringling management was paid extra money for allowing the circus production numbers, which he conceived and directed, to

be used in the film—recalled, "I consider these circus chores pretty much of a nightmare and marvel how I was able to take them as long as I did." Anderson, who later asserted that DeMille surrounded himself with bullying executives and "yes" men, had a further run-in with DeMille over film credit. Claiming that no one ever shared a director's credit with DeMille, the filmmaker's business representatives at first refused to honor Anderson's request for a proper directorial credit. Finally, they relented, and Anderson was



acknowledged as the stager of the circus' musical and dance numbers. Richard Barstow, at the time Anderson's choreographer and later his successor as the circus's director, also received screen credit.

Popular children's TV star "Howdy Doody" also appeared in the show as an added attraction (his human TV pal, "Buffalo Bob" Smith, who couldn't be cloned like the marionette, commuted to the show from his New York base on weekends for public appearances) and the still large "clown alley" included all the greats, among them Felix Adler, Paul Jung, Paul Jerome, Paul Wenzel, Charley Bell, Buzzie Potts, Prince Paul, Ernie Burch, the Hanlons, and Duane Thorpe, who, upon his clown retirement a few years ago, was the last of the clowns from the glorious canvas days to depart the Ringling show. (These were the days when Ringling clowns often included commercial sponsor's products in their acts for which the show received hefty fees. Schwinn bicycles, American Airlines, and Bulova watches were among the show's big sponsors in 1951.)

DeMille claimed that he first thought of doing a circus movie in 1922, John Murray Anderson writes in his autobiography *Out Without My Rubbers*. Anderson further claims that he first brought up the idea of a circus movie, featuring the Ringling show, nearly 50 years ago: "In 1943, I suggested to Robert Ringling that a motion picture bearing the title 'The Greatest Show on Earth' might be a great proposition. Robert gave me authority to explore its possibilities and on my return to New York from Sarasota I presented the idea to my old friend, Gil Boag, who had successfully promoted several motion pictures, with the result that Lowell Thomas was engaged to compile a biography of the Ringling Brothers."

Thomas's book was reportedly completed but never published. Anderson adds that after Robert Ringling died, he suggested the movie idea to John Ringling North. By that time, however, North was working on a deal with Hollywood movie mogul David O. Selznick.

Originally, Selznick was to make the ultimate circus movie and he had signed an option agreement with John Ringling North in April, 1948, to film such an epic at a cost of \$6 million (DeMille worked with a \$4 million budget), using the sprawling torso and sawdust charm of the latter's real-life Greatest Show on Earth.

Selznick told the *New York Times*: "The idea of doing a picture with that title and the co-operation of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus must have occurred to a lot of people over the years, but we plan to give a conception of what



DeMille and Emmett Kelly confer on the circus back lot during filming. Kelly later went to Hollywood for a number of weeks to shoot additional scenes. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

actually happened during an entire season at the circus. It won't go back to Barnum, that is, it won't be a historical film, it will be contemporary, with personal stories included against the background of the circus."

As time elapsed, however, the veteran movie maker's plans made little progress and his option expired in 1948. Reportedly, fellow producer DeMille read about Selznick's lost deal in the daily show business trade paper, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and immediately began to pursue the concept of a circus movie with North. With a long list of epic-like pictures to his credit—including the then-recently released *Samson and Delilah*, DeMille was well-suited to the task of producing a resplendent circus movie.

On June 20, 1949, DeMille inked a deal with Ringling-Barnum for the use of the show's facilities and personnel for a fee to the circus of \$250,000. One clause in the contract stipulated that Ringling would not make any measurable changes in the show's size prior to the completion of filming. So began the slow, tedious preparation for what movie critics later called DeMille's best film effort. (On the evening of March 19, 1953, at the first televised Academy Awards ceremonies in Hollywood history, *The Greatest Show on Earth* won two Oscars, one for Best Picture and

one for Best Screenplay. DeMille—by now over 70 years old—also personally received a third Oscar for a lifetime of service to the movie craft).

Hollywood promoter-agent Milton Pickman, who, ironically, was later recruited by Ringling-Barnum to "modernize" its circus advertising and promotion efforts for the 1955 season and who also, coincidentally, once dated actress Betty Hutton who starred in DeMille's circus film, was allegedly responsible for putting DeMille and John Ringling North together at the bargaining table.

North, a brash negotiator, initially pressed for a 50% interest in the film. DeMille and his studio, Paramount (the same studio currently being sued by satirist Art Buchwald over profit participation issues concerning a Buchwald-drafted script), balked at such a demand, so North reportedly settled for a 50% interest in the movie's grosses after DeMille had deducted two times the "negative costs," negative costs representing the cumulative costs of production resulting in the end product.

Since Hollywood, however, has been known to use accounting methods akin to old-fashioned circus bookkeeping techniques, North waited and waited for any noticeable profits, ultimately suing the studio in 1958 for his share of the film's revenues. To date, the film has reportedly grossed over \$20 million worldwide and the circus has received royalties well in excess of one-million dollars.

To get a taste for the real thing, DeMille set off on a tour with the circus beginning in the summer of 1949. This was to be the first of many DeMille big top visits.

"My purpose in joining the circus for four weeks was to enable us to get acquainted with the people backstage, live with them, chat with them and accompany them to the Main Streets of the wheatlands," he reported in the 1950 circus program-magazine. "In those travels I found the circus the most unifying force in American life. One need only to observe a circus audience. Nothing so much as the circus evokes a fundamental simplicity in human nature. I like to look upon the circus as a microcosm in which all peoples and all governments may find an example of the enormous strength that can lie in cooperation, tolerance and unity. That, to me, is the circus, truly the greatest show on earth."

He came to be charmed by the many "mini-stories" that he found backstage at



the circus, which helped to further illuminate his mind and feed his enthusiasm for the upcoming circus movie. While with the show, DeMille most often lived aboard the "Jomar," John Ringling North's private railroad car hooked to the rear of the circus train, and he enjoyed the many luxurious amenities and staff which it provided.

As the picture was about to be released in 1952, DeMille remarked to the columnist Hedda Hopper that of the previous films he had made, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, was the most difficult to produce. As to why he wanted to make the picture in 1951, DeMille proclaimed: "The whole world has a stomach ache and I thought it needed some laughter." Another possible motivation for DeMille's interest was his claim that like so many others, he, too, was a circus fan since childhood.

DeMille told the Milwaukee *Journal* while visiting there on August 9, 1949, as



a guest of the show, "One of the girl aerialists has a little boy, about four. She fell once and was seriously hurt. I've noticed that every time she goes on the little boy goes with her to the entrance of the tent. She hugs him and gives him a kiss just before she goes on. The boy goes away, he doesn't watch his mother, but he listens to the music that signals the end of the act, he comes running to the entrance and leaps into his mother's arms as she leaves the tent."

Initially, DeMille's greatest concern was coming up with a suitable script, which proved far more difficult than originally anticipated. It was DeMille's desire to come up with a circus-themed story that had all the flavor of the classic film, *Grand Hotel*. He even had a model circus built so that he could carefully study the circus landscape.

An unusually large number of writers, seven in all, were ultimately involved in fashioning the final script, which finally encompassed all the elements DeMille was desperately seeking to include

among the grandeur of the world's mightiest circus enterprise.

One of DeMille's great hallmarks as a movie maker was his dedication to detail and authenticity. Perhaps more than any other producer-director, DeMille poured enormous effort into researching his movie subjects and *The Greatest Show on Earth* was no exception. During the long process of assembling a suitable story, DeMille and his research staff, which included DeMille research regular Henry Noerdlinger who was on the payroll at \$500 a week, not only canvassed the circus for information, but also viewed, over and over again, numerous circus films. Among the titles, *Chad Hanna*, *Variety*, *Laugh Clown Laugh*, and *The Mighty Barnum*.

In the 1951 circus program, DeMille wrote: "Ours will be a modern story drawn from the life, loves, hates, jealousies and conflicts of circus people. Bar-

Cornel Wilde strolls across a busy and crowded back yard during one of the film's scenes. Courtesy of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

num gave the world a broad and dramatic canvas. We hope we can paint on it that measure of the circus which is its greatest strength."

"After a year of rummaging about in every literary quarter, we ended in a blind and very stubborn alley. If your research comes out as ours did, you will discover that there is precious little to choose from in the way of circus fiction. Our first thought, find a circus novel and adapt it to the screen, was a serene, beautiful, exotic thought—and entirely naive."

Getting an acceptable script took the better part of a year-and-a-half. The cast of writers assembled by DeMille were constantly harassed by the boss who never hesitated to use sarcasm, often publicly, while criticising their work during lunch meetings at the studio's commissary. Phil Koury, at the time a young

DeMille aide, describes, in an excerpt from his memoirs, *Yes, Mr. DeMille*, the ceremony typically surrounding a DeMille luncheon: "The crunch, crunch (a 'sound effect' prompted by DeMille's consumption of a daily reserve of potato chips), accompanied by digs, often not sly, at the hungry aides for work done or left undone, created a barrier to the healthy flow of the staff's gastric juices."

DeMille endlessly studied and scrutinized the principal characters' personalities and relationships. On an almost daily basis, he grilled the fatigued assortment of writers on the characters, the plots, and the high drama which he intellectually strived for in the finished script. He had specific opinions about what characters should have which idiosyncrasies and wasn't afraid to share these ideas with his staff.

At one point, the writers came up with what became fondly known as "The Jody Version," so named after DeMille's grandson, Jody Harper. DeMille, frustrated and near panic at one point by his writers' inability to come up with a suitable script, believed that a story treatment which his eight year-old grandson could comprehend might provide the nucleus of an acceptable plot. The 17 page result proved to be most helpful, tying together a mass of unrelated bits and pieces of plot that had been amassing in a pile in the writer's studio bungalow while awaiting a spot in the final script.

Since DeMille had at first hoped to take an existing circus novel and adapt it to the screen, the subsequent experience of hatching a story from scratch, after DeMille and his researchers were unable to locate a suitable book, took its toll, financially and emotionally. By November, 1950, Paramount had spent \$113,000 on the script alone—a sizable allocation in 1950 for scriptwriting—and DeMille was readying location photography which would begin in 1951. Ultimately, the picture would involve 285,000 acting extras (the actual circus audiences on the road; circus tickets that season carried a legal disclaimer on the back advising patrons that they were possibly being filmed and might subsequently appear in the finished film) and roughly 70,000 additional extras—drawn from the circus' winter quarters neighborhood—for the circus parade sequence which was shot in Sarasota on February 17, 1951.

As the writers dragged on readying their script, artist John Jensen, still an art school student in Los Angeles, was recruited by DeMille to "hit the road" and draw everything and anything he could of the circus. Jensen, still active today as a designer in the movie business, had been "discovered" by a DeMille associate who attended a local exhibit in which some of



the young artist's drawings appeared.

In July of 1950, Jensen joined out with Ringling at its nine-day stand in Chicago, accumulating numerous drawings of circus equipment (the show was then sometimes utilizing a short-lived, five pole big top with the menagerie stashed in front of this elongated tent set-up, eliminating the need for a menagerie tent), performers, and paraphernalia. "During the war," Jensen told this writer, "I drew maps, so I had a good perspective and understood scale."

After a month-and-a-half of traveling with the show and living on the train, Jensen returned with his sketch books to Hollywood, supplying DeMille and his writers with hundreds of rough, small drawings of every kind of circus minutiae. "The circus people gave me complete access to the entire show," he adds. "Because I was drawing them rather than photographing behind the scenes, they were much less reluctant about letting me peek into their daily lives."

"I enjoyed living among them for that time. I ate in the cookhouse, slept on the train in my own stateroom, and experienced the full range of circus life. It was a very rough way of life but I fondly remember the Concellos, Emmett Kelly, Tuffy Genders, Felix Adler, Pat Valdo, and the rest."

Based on Jensen's multiple drawings, the film's writers were able to get a real insight into circus life, and upon his return to Hollywood he continued to work closely with them. An attractive sampling of his drawings appear on the pages of the special *Greatest Show on Earth* program which Paramount published and sold for 25 cents at theatres around the country exhibiting the movie.

As preparations for the filming continued at DeMille's headquarters, Jensen worked on other aspects of the movie. "I did all the storyboards for the train wreck scene and actually studied train wrecks in order to come up with an accurate depiction of what cars go where in such an accident situation. The model train we used for some of the shots actually had a steam engine and the locomotive alone was about twelve feet long. I remember DeMille's orders well: 'Find out anything you can about train wrecks!'"

Later, 20 railroad cars painted in the circus colors and motif, were purchased for train wreck scenes. Many of these were hoisted skyward and dropped in a heap to effect a grizzly crash. When filming of



DeMille directing clowns Jimmy Armstrong and Paul Jerome on May 28, 1951 in Easton, Pennsylvania. Pfening Archives.

these scenes commenced on Paramount's giant stage #16, many of the monkeys being used for the sequence accidentally escaped and ventured off of Paramount's property, racing to a nearby cemetery where they were finally captured.

Although the late, legendary Edith Head, veteran of numerous award-winning films, designed costumes for the movie cast, Jensen, along with his other artistic duties, designed Jimmy Stewart's costume for his role as Buttons the clown. Miles White, the Broadway costumer who had designed circus production wardrobe off and on since 1942, was on board for the designing of costumes to be worn by circus personnel and as part of Paramount's deal with Ringling-Barnum, the studio paid for a big part of the 1952 circus wardrobe budget (exclusively loyal to John Ringling North, White recently told this writer that he re-fused to work for the circus during the Robert Ringling years).

New York-based Brooks Costume Company (once known as Brooks-Van Horn and now called Eaves-Brooks), which has built Ringling costumes since the late 1960s, also executed White's elaborate designs for the 1951 show.

Since the circus's big top interiors, which at the time housed 28 of Art Concello's highly-efficient seat wagons plus the menagerie and a three-ring staging area (considerably smaller in size from the glory days of five rings and four stages and, later, three rings and two stages), had never been photographed by a Hollywood movie company before, DeMille encountered serious lighting problems. Although the existing lighting served the live performance well, it was highly inadequate for the light-sensitive movie film of the day. To overcome his dilemma, DeMille not only had to create a

special lighting system but also went to the world-famous film manufacturer, Technicolor, and had them pioneer a new, fast speed 35mm sensitized film which was used for the first time in filming *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

The lights which DeMille's crew came up with were 100,000 watt incandescent cold lights which were mounted on the show's five center poles and long quarter poles, while the show's regular lights, operated by veteran circus lighting director Doug Morris, were, as always, hung on both the short and long quarter poles.

The DeMille lights, which can be seen in some of the publicity "long shots" of the show's interior during public performances, were positioned much higher on the poles than were Ringling's, and, according to Morris, the incredibly powerful movie lights (each of which was powered by 32 conductors encased in thick cables), also lit the audience as needed, and never interfered with the show's smooth operation. It took eight movie location generators, built by the Mole-Richardson Company in Hollywood, to power all of the DeMille equipment, since it was impossible for the circus' own generators to absorb such a massive, additional load.

One of the unique aspects of the DeMille lights were their remote control operation. At various locations in the big top, switching devices controlled the movement of the lights, which could easily "pan" and "spot" the action, among other things. After filming was completed, the circus kept the DeMille lights, reports Morris, but they were never later used on a regular basis. "The circus workers had a way of getting rid of burdensome extras," he laughs. "One time, management bought a lot of color gels (plastic, colored disks which fit over white lights to create various colors) for my lights. They soon showed up floating in a river near one of the show lots!"

Along with the script and lights, DeMille's other headache was casting the picture. Many star names were rumored to be involved and the producer-director's early choices included Clark Gable, Marlene Dietrich, Burt Lancaster (who had formerly been a circus performer but was now under contract at a competing studio, Warner Bros.), Kirk Douglas, and Hedy Lamarr. Lucille Ball was cast as the elephant girl Angel, but had to withdraw later when she became pregnant. Casting began in earnest in the fall of 1950, and DeMille was quick to ask his old pal, William Boyd ("Hopalong



Cassidy"), to make a cameo appearance, which the horse-riding actor did as part of the film's circus "spec" scene.

Among the stars vying for roles were Paulette Goddard and Betty Hutton. Goddard, in fact, assumed that she had the featured female role, and telegraphed DeMille that she'd soon be returning to Hollywood and was looking forward to getting to work on his picture. "Hope all those rumors about my going into *The Greatest Show on Earth* are true," she wrote. "Am returning on Monday to sign the contract." Although Goddard had appeared in other DeMille films, he wasn't interested in her for the circus project, partly the result of an old grudge he held against her from having worked together on a previous picture.

Betty Hutton (who first appeared in films in 1941 alongside her *Greatest Show on Earth* co-star Dorothy Lamour, by then a seasoned Hollywood pro), who had been a major star at Paramount, DeMille's home studio, used all her powers of persuasion to get the imposing director to include her in his plans. At first, DeMille objected to casting Hutton, telling her that her hips were too big for the role of a circus performer.

A determined Hutton, however, promised to trim down, and even sent DeMille a circus-themed floral arrangement that reportedly cost \$1,000, and on which was featured a miniature trapeze with a tiny Hutton look-alike doll perched upon it. After personally meeting with him and finally cajoling him into making her an offer, Hutton, who had most recently been a big hit in the movie version of *Annie Get Your Gun*, walked away with not one but two possible roles.

For the first time in his career, DeMille allegedly offered Hutton her choice of roles, Angel, the elephant girl or Holly, the trapezist. As fans of the movie know well, Hutton opted for the role of Holly, wisely snagging first billing in the movie's opening credits. Fellow actress and co-star, Dorothy Lamour, called Hutton's campaign to get the role "zealous."

Hedy Lamarr turned DeMille down and his other choices for key roles weren't panning out. Time was running short as DeMille struggled to finalize his cast. For the male lead, DeMille needed a masculine, athletic personality. Charlton Heston, at the time a 26 year-old New York actor, wasn't the obvious choice at the time for the role of Brad, the circus manager, which was supposedly based loosely on the personalities of several circus executives, including Art Concello.

Heston appeared in one movie, *Dark City*, which Paramount had heavily promoted in 1950 with little result. While at the studio, he briefly met DeMille, who was not impressed with the young actor's

performance. Heston also appeared the same year in a small unknown film, *Julius Caesar*, which came to DeMille's attention later and left enough of an impression to prompt DeMille to contact Heston's agent. DeMille offered Heston the Brad role, and he quickly snatched it up.

Unfortunately, Heston—whose role was key to the entire movie's plot and whose starring part in *The Greatest Show on Earth*



Tuffy Genders holds Betty Hutton's trapeze web during a scene shot in Sarasota where the Ringling big top was erected for a number of interior shots early in 1951. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

helped launch a long and distinguished film career—graciously declined to be interviewed for this article, noting: "I'm in the midst of writing my autobiography and only last week (4/10/91) I wrote the chapter containing *The Greatest Show on Earth*. It was, as you must know, an important film for me."

Heston, of course, took on his first big film acting assignment with the DeMille casting. "I was never intimate with him, but he was always kind to me. With very rare exceptions, he was courteous to actors, but he could be very tough. He was very hard on prop men and crew."

Like others before him, Heston found that DeMille provided his actors little direction, expecting them, instead, to closely follow the script and to show up fully prepared. Unlike the rest of the principal actors, Heston didn't have to learn any special skills for his part, but he did ap-

proach the job with a thoroughness that endeared him to DeMille.

While other cast members endured various physical discomforts and even injuries in their various roles, Heston's only role-related physical pain occurred later in the filming when the dramatic circus train wreck scenes were recreated on a Paramount backlot. With parts of the train wreckage wedged against him for the scene, Heston reportedly experienced great discomfort during shooting (11 extras and technicians were injured while these sequences were filmed after the cast returned to Hollywood from Sarasota).

Starting with *The Greatest Show on Earth*, Heston experienced eye soreness and eye fatigue from the powerful arc lights used in filming movies, especially when photography is done on location away from the studio. This problem would plague him for years to come in other pictures.

"Charlton Heston's talent had not matured as much as it has now, but he was an effective, hard driving boss of the circus," DeMille later wrote in his autobiography, first published in 1959.

Dorothy Lamour, who had already appeared in 45 motion pictures—most notably the *Road* series in which she co-starred with Bing Crosby and Bob Hope—was 37 years-old when she was cast as Phyllis, the hula girl who sings John Ringling North's "Lovely Luawana Lady," the musical number featured in the big show's 1951 aerial ballet starring Spanish aerialist Pinito Del Oro over the center ring.

In preparation for her role, Lamour underwent weeks of iron jaw training in Hollywood under the supervision of legendary trapeze star Antoinette Concello. Says Lamour, in her autobiography, *My Side of the Road*, "Paramount sent me to a dentist who took an impression of my teeth and made upper and lower plates, into which my own teeth fitted perfectly. Then both plates were tightly attached to a wide leather strap. Get the picture?"

According to the actress, who in a recent interview for this article warmly recalled her days under the big top, she was deathly afraid of heights but because she was looking up—not down—when performing iron jaw, the acrophobia she normally suffered was somewhat relieved. When it came time, however, to perform her iron jaw stunt before the cameras and a live circus audience at the Philadelphia



stand, where many location shots for the movie were filmed, DeMille canceled the scene, possibly nervous at the last minute over a potential accident.

For Lamour, acting in *The Greatest Show on Earth* was a memorable experience. "Working for Mr. DeMille was a great honor, and the circus people were my buddies. I still regularly hear from a few of them."

To show her enduring affection for her circus pals, Lamour recalls how generous these troupers were when her son became deathly ill while on location with her at circus winterquarters in Sarasota, where over a month's worth of filming with the entire cast, excepting Jimmy Stewart, took place beginning on January 15, 1951.

"My son caught the measles which ran their normal course but then turned into encephalitis. We flew him back to Los Angeles and rushed him to the hospital where we were told that if he lived he'd be crippled for life. He needed a blood transfusion immediately and his blood type was a rare one."

Without delay, Lamour's newfound circus friends were on the phone from Sarasota. "The phone rang and I picked up the receiver, only to hear the plunk of coins being dropped into a pay phone. Someone at the circus had my son's blood type and wanted to pitch in and fly out to Los Angeles." Ultimately, Lamour's make-up man, Harry Ray, came through for her in Hollywood and none of the circus folk were called upon.

Later that year, when the Ringling show played in Los Angeles, a grateful Lamour and her husband, William Ross Howard, threw a party for the circus troupe at their posh Beverly Hills home. Since the circus cast arrived packed into six big buses, Lamour had to invite the local chief of police, too, in order to get permission to park the unusually-large vehicles on a typically quiet residential street. A good time was had by all and Lamour's family later visited the circus, along with other members of *The Greatest Show on Earth's* Hollywood crew, during its Los Angeles engagement in September of 1951.

Gloria Grahame, who won an Academy Award for her performance in the *Bad and the Beautiful* the same year (1953) in which *The Greatest Show on Earth* also won an Oscar, ended up with the role of Angel, the elephant girl, which was originally intended for Lucille Ball. In an interview with the Los Angeles *Daily News*, Gra-



DeMille amuses Gloria Grahame between shots of the elephant act in which she starred as Angel, the elephant girl. Actor Lyle Bettger looks on in background. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

hame described the casting experience: "It isn't often a gal is invited to do a DeMille epic. They told me to go and see DeMille. He started right in talking about the part. I was dreaming about an acting plum and completely hypnotized by his honeyed words, when something jarred me from my trance, something DeMille was saying... 'and then the elephant puts its foot in your face.' Me? Its foot? When he was finished I was almost ready to chuck Paramount and join the circus."

Grahame—who said she was never so scared in her life as when she was working with the elephants—prepared for her role with famed Ringling trainer "Arky" Scott, and she actually performed in the main elephant act while the show played Philadelphia and the cameras rolled before a local, live audience. Her elephant companion throughout the picture was Minyak, and Grahame said, "It was hate at first sight. Supposedly, she was the soft-hearted lady of the Ringling elephants."

During her first rehearsal in Sarasota, Grahame watched Minyak perform with a seasoned showgirl. As the giant elephant made its way around the ring, it dropped the girl. This understandably

caused Grahame to have second thoughts about her role. "My mind quickly turned over the idea of asking DeMille for a part as a ticket seller," she laughingly reported.

*Life* magazine, on hand during the Philadelphia filming, vividly describes Gloria's public debut as Angel, the elephant girl, who's seen in the film performing with the fictional elephant boss, Klaus, played by actor Lyle Bettger. "She had to let an elephant put its foot on her face; and though fortified by the knowledge that an elephant will never put its weight on an unstable object like the human nose, she couldn't help thinking that an elephant can be expected to make one mistake in its long life. Gloria got her nose smudged without incident, but then the elephant came close to making that one mistake."

Grahame actually experienced two close calls that resulted in bruises while working with the elephants. The first was in her ring scenes, shot in Philadelphia, when she almost got squashed as she barely missed grabbing the elephant's headpiece.

Escaping from that close call, the tenacious actress was slightly injured again while shooting one of the train wreck scenes back in Hollywood. In the script, she was supposed to instruct an elephant to pick up a heavy beam that was pinning Brad, the circus manager, down on the ground. As the scene progressed, however, the elephant mistakenly made a grab for her hand. Reeling it back to escape possible injury, Grahame accidentally hit her hand on a nail. Letting out a wild scream accompanied by several choice profanities, Grahame brought shooting to an immediate halt as DeMille was especially repulsed by cursing on the sets of his films.

Despite her treading on DeMille's sensibilities, the famed director liked Grahame, saying of her while shooting *The Greatest Show on Earth*: "She has the manner of a schoolgirl and the eyes of a sorceress."

After a long struggle with cancer, Grahame died at the age of 57 in a New York hospital on October 5, 1981, survived by six children, including four who were fathered during her marriage to a former stepson, Tony Ray.

When cast by DeMille as "The Great Sebastian," actor Cornel Wilde, 35 years-old at the time, and, like so many veteran circus performers, fluent in five languages, was reportedly experiencing a pro-



fessional slump, following a decade of film glory, including a featured role in *Forever Amber*. Originally, the role had gone to an unnamed French actor, since DeMille wanted to capture the international flavor of the circus. The actor, however, was fired when the director discovered that he couldn't climb a rope.

With his pensive, continental-style good looks, athletic build, and physical agility, derived from his one-time membership on the U.S. fencing team, Wilde, a medical school graduate, turned out to be an effective choice, despite his admitted fear of heights. DeMille, who was often unpleasant to actors who showed any anxiety about their assignment, was cool to Wilde after learning of his fear of heights. On the set one day, he sarcastically remarked to Wilde, who was about to put on a pair of clogs, "Better not wear those, Mr. Wilde. You're afraid of heights."

Acrophobia aside, Wilde trained vigorously for his aerialist role back in Hollywood on Paramount's stage #13 under the tutelage of Ringling aerialist Billy Snyder; while practicing during an intense 10-day period, Wilde managed to sprain his back. When it came time to shoot aerial scenes featuring "The Great Sebastian," his anxiety was somewhat relieved by the lowering of his trapeze rigging, normally perched about 40 feet in the air. Further accommodations were made for the actor by covering the safety nets underneath his rigging with burlap bags to conceal the hard ground many feet below.

For Wilde, 1951 proved to be a particularly meaningful year both personally and professionally. Not only did he snag a major role in an Academy Award-winning movie, but he also divorced one wife, as filming commenced, and married another soon after the DeMille production concluded. *Newsweek* magazine later said about his performance: "Wilde plays what could have been a garden variety of rake with considerable charm and muscular plausibility."

Following the release of the movie, many comics mimicked "The Great Sebastian" in nightclub acts and on TV, satirically impersonating the lame aerialist's badly injured arm, which he regularly hid under an ever-present trench coat, and they, too, shamelessly mocked the character's pseudo foreign accent.

With a long list of acting successes to his credit, many of them in so-called

swashbuckling "costume pictures" popular early in his career and participation in a variety of film projects as a producer-director, Wilde died in Los Angeles, of leukemia, on October 16, 1989, at the age of 74, still cutting a dashing figure both on-screen and off.

Although his role was considered minor, in contrast to the others, Jimmy Stewart, in the role of Buttons the clown, took on a prominent place in the film's advertising and publicity strategy since clowns most singularly personify the



Cornel Wilde and Betty Hutton inside the big top during a teardown scene on March 1, 1951. Pfening Archives.

world of the circus. They are its pegs, as P. T. Barnum once claimed.

Already a major star, and now, in his old age, most certainly an acting legend, Stewart, who five years earlier had headlined in the unforgettable Christmas tearjerker, *It's A Wonderful Life*, unabashedly solicited DeMille for the clown role, a role in which his real-life face was never revealed on screen.

"I had always loved the circus," he remembers. "When I heard that DeMille was making a circus film, I sent a wire and asked if I could be in it and play a clown. You see, everyone wanted to do this picture. We all had our dreams about running away and joining the circus. Making the film was a joyous time for everybody, much more than just a movie."

Emmett Kelly helped coach Stewart for his clown role, and while the two worked on location with the circus in Philadelphia, most of their scenes were shot in Hollywood against a yellow screen backdrop and then blended—or matted—into sequences shot elsewhere.

"It didn't take long before we all felt that we were a part of the circus family," Stewart recalled in Dorothy Lamour's au-

tobiography. "There's something about the circus life, you get engulfed in it. We all really became circus people, and I must say it was a very nice feeling."

Among the many real-life circus performers included in the movie, clown Emmett Kelly, more than any other circus member, received the most exposure and work as a result of his participation, enjoying a total of 15 weeks on the movie sets of *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

When word of the planned film first reached him, he was, ironically, wrapping up work on a David Selznick film, *The Fat Man*, in which he played a clown who was also a murderer. Although the producer originally wanted Kelly to portray his trademark hobo character, he refused, on the advice of Walt Disney and others; instead, Kelly invented a new clown character for the role. By this time in his career, Kelly had, of course, reached some level of notoriety among the public and was sought out, via his theatrical agent, for other, non-circus projects.

Although he only had two words of dialogue in the final cut of the picture (in a scene with Betty Hutton during the famous circus train wreck, he quips, "What? Parade?"), Kelly often appeared on camera throughout the film. For the 1951 season, he joined the show for its annual opening at Madison Square Garden but was quickly excused by circus management in order to join DeMille's crew already at work filming in Hollywood, having returned there from a five-week shoot in Sarasota during the circus' winter layoff.

Director Stanley Goldsmith would later supervise filming by a "B" unit (a second film crew used to capture location shots not utilizing actors) of various circus set-up shots, many of which appear during the opening sequences of the film.

As a member of the elite movie cast, Kelly, alone among other circus performers, was given the full "star treatment" including limousine service to and from hotels while filming with the circus on location. He was kept busy filming in Hollywood and on the road with the circus until late summer, returning to the show in early August in Denver for the balance of the season's tour. In retrospect, Kelly's only complaint about filmmaking was regarding the working hours, which in the movie business are often long and begin just past dawn, in contrast to a later, more leisurely circus performing schedule. When the film was premiered



the following year in Sarasota at the Florida Theatre, Kelly was a main participant in the splashy, Hollywood-style opening, riding to the theatre in a chauffeured open car with the Governor of Florida.

Prior to heading for Sarasota, Betty Hutton and Dorothy Lamour underwent rigorous training in Hollywood, on Paramount's sound stage #5, where a circus gym was assembled, under the tutelage of Tony Concello. Starting on a ladder, Lamour slowly adapted to the iron jaw mouthpiece she was to use in suspending her weight before DeMille's cameras. Meanwhile, Hutton was preparing to perform 40-feet in the air on the single, head balancing trapeze as well as on the flying trapeze, which she rehearsed for nearly four months.

About doing her own aerial stunts, Hutton cracked: "You just don't say 'No' to Mr. DeMille. He said he would not tolerate doubles; moreover, he wanted to get close-ups. After all, this was a circus picture and my role called for flying. It was four months of benevolent torture before I was able to fly through the air with any ease."

For an amateur to so quickly learn the basic tricks associated with the aforesaid aerial skills was so astonishing to so many people in the industry that rumors began circulating to the effect that Hutton, despite publicity hype, wasn't really performing her own stunts; a double was always being used. During the Philadelphia stand, Hutton was filmed performing 50 feet in the air. To counter these claims, DeMille invited esteemed film critic Omar Ranney of the *Cleveland Press* to witness her performance himself, and to later sign an affidavit confirming what he saw. This clever testimony had its intended effect and the rumors of Hutton's fakery were soon vanished.

In an interview prior to the release of the film, Hutton noted, "C. B. is a player's director. I do my very own stunts and am not ashamed to admit that when time came for me to climb forty feet I was scared out of my wits. Then C. B. gave me an assuring smile, and a pat on the cheek, and I felt reassured."

Traveling to Sarasota on January 10, 1951, for the start of filming, Hutton arrived with her mother, Mabel, and her two children, Lindsay and Candy (at present the two are reportedly estranged from their now 70 year-old mother). Hutton, like the other stars arriving in Sarasota, was housed in her own seaside home for the duration of filming at winter

quarters. As each star came to town by either plane or rail, the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* gave their arrivals generous front page coverage. In describing Dorothy Lamour's visit--Lamour and Gloria Grames arrived by train together--the local paper reported that the actress arrived in town with a chauffeur and a "negro" governor.



Jimmy Stewart, portraying Buttons the clown, taking a break between shooting on the Philadelphia lot where much of the filming was done. Clown Buzzie Potts is on Stewart's left. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

DeMille traveled to Florida from Hollywood by train, repeatedly studying the final script during the entire journey (unlike many directors, DeMille rigidly adhered to the script once filming began with little room allowed for last-minute ad-libbing or restaging). When he arrived at the Atlantic Seaboard station, DeMille was greeted by a circus contingent consisting of Henry Ringling North (John Ringling North was at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for a surgical) and Pat Valdo, among others. A seven passenger limousine whisked him and his party away to the old Ringling Hotel, where the DeMille entourage headquartered while working in Sarasota.

When she visited winter quarters the day after her Sarasota arrival, it was reported that Hutton charmed everyone on

the lot, including Ruth the elephant. Wilde, who arrived days later, told the local press, "This is an exciting role and I intend to make the most of it." Describing his short but intense aerial training back in Hollywood, he added, "For the first few days my hands were a mess of blisters, but now they have toughened up and I find the aerial act full of excitement." Because he joined the cast late, Wilde underwent only 10 days of training prior to the start of location filming in Sarasota.

As cast members arrived in town, Paramount's crews prepared winter quarters for an onslaught of filming. When DeMille's crew first arrived in Sarasota, the circus staff wasn't particularly co-operative with DeMille's Hollywood retinue of technicians, who were continually frustrated with set-up delays caused by the indifferent Ringling crew. Quickly, however, DeMille's lieutenant's learned that greasing the right palms helped expedite their needs, and once the cash flowed, all went smoothly. Art Concello was reportedly paid \$10,000 to consult on the film and many others allegedly received smaller cash payments for assisting the film crew. A special "mess tent" was erected to provide meals for the film's cast and crew and an elaborate two-way radio system--which required special FCC permissions--was set up between winter quarters and the Ringling Hotel so

that the crew could be in constant touch with each other. A "concrete patio" was poured near the rail lines so that film cameras could be moved around while filming certain scenes (today, miniature train tracks are laid on the ground so that cameras mounted on a platform, supported with wheels that fit into the tracks, can smoothly follow moving objects or people). The big top, erected for filming, was barricaded for security purposes and the growing frenzy of activity caused by the residency of DeMille and company went far to boost attendance at winter quarters. In those days, the Ringling show ran paid display ads in the local paper promoting public attendance at winter quarters, charging an admission fee of 75 cents for adults and 35 cents for children. While the filming continued locally, groups of school children, grades 3-6, were provided free tours of the movie set.

Local businesses even got into the movie spirit with such stores as Harmon's Mens Wear and the Pine Avenue Shop featuring special circus-themed ads promoting the film crews' local visit.





While filming in Sarasota, DeMille's crew employed over 1,000 extras who were recruited through the local unemployment office and paid 75 cents an hour. On January 7, 1951, planning began for the filming of the big circus parade sequence in downtown Sarasota and the next day Betty Hutton successfully shot a crucial scene in which she dropped from the trapeze into Charlton Heston's arms.

On Saturday, February 17, the circus parade scenes were shot in downtown Sarasota, beginning at 10:45 AM, and great crowds of spectators began lining up as early as 7 AM. The itinerary included Seventh, Central, Main and Orange Streets, and the parade was staged twice along this route in order to capture the needed parade footage. Five cameras were set up at different locations to catch the action and DeMille roamed along the route on a mobile camera truck. Twelve elephants and many circus performers participated in this sequence, which in the movie symbolized the gallant circus survivalship in which the show must go on, despite a devastating train wreck only hours before. Local boy and girl scout troops were recruited to assist police with security.

Sitting on a single trapeze suspended from a trailer mounted-framework, Betty Hutton's enthusiastic spirit was briefly dampened when the rigging accidentally got hung up on a wire strung across a street.

The night of February 25 was a star-studded affair with the opening of DeMille's new film, *Samson and Delilah*, at the Florida Theatre. Many of *The Greatest Show on Earth*'s principal stars were in attendance for a Hollywood-style bash under the kleig lights.

The spectacular wreck scene in the film. Pfening Archives.

Back at winterquarters, filming progressed. On February 27, scenes utilizing the Ringling hippo were completed and the following week John Ringling North's scenes—which were also later shot in Hollywood—were completed after just three "takes."

Filming began to wind down in early March and a big cast party was staged on a boat on March 6. It was decided that the crew required an extra week to finish all of its work and "exterior shots" needed were the last matters to be attended to, prior to the crews' departure on March 10. The night loading scene was one of the final, important scenes to be shot in Sarasota, where it was completed on March 8. In a final gesture of appreciation for the publicity and revenue which his picture generated for the city, the local government bestowed an Honorary Citizen award on DeMille on March 9 at a special ceremony hosted by the mayor.

Dorothy Lamour was one of the last cast members to leave town, staying on an extra day to toss out the first ball at a Boston Red Sox spring training game played locally. Lamour especially enjoyed her Sarasota visit, and liked telling a story around the circus lot about her son's fishing escapades while there. One day, it seems, he appeared in the rented house with a trout hooked on the fishing line. Looking up at Lamour, he astutely remarked, "See mommy, it's hanging by its teeth, just like you do."

After his film was edited, back in Hollywood, and ready for release, DeMille encountered two unexpected obstacles, the Catholic church's Legion of Decency, which, in those days, was a vocal op-

ponent of films in which material thought offensive to its members was featured, and the film industry's self-appointed censors.

Eight lines of DeMille dialogue were eventually edited out of the film and the flamboyant producer engaged in a long and feisty dialogue with church representatives. Dressing room scenes in which women were scantily attired were deemed inappropriate by the censors, along with such lines as, "I was never thrown out of bed before like that."

Suggestions of euthanasia in a line exchanged between Betty Hutton and Jimmy Stewart was also axed. The Legion of Decency was especially upset over the character of Sebastian, calling Cornel Wilde's alter ego, "unsavory." It eventually gave DeMille's picture a "B" rating, one step above its much-feared designation of "condemned." Ironically, both *Parents Magazine* and *The Christian Herald* representing the Protestant Motion Picture Council gave *The Greatest Show on Earth* their highest awards for motion picture achievement.

*The Greatest Show on Earth* was released on January 2, 1952, and officially opened on January 10, 1952, at New York City's Radio City Music Hall to generally enthusiastic reviews and strong business. The *New York Daily News* said, "*The Greatest Show on Earth* is just that." And the *New York Times*' veteran film critic Bosley Crowther wrote, "two American institutions (Ringling Bros. and DeMille) have combined to put out a piece of entertainment that will delight movie audiences for years."

DeMille's pictures were often panned by critics and movie industry insiders, so the favorable notices accorded *The Greatest Show on Earth* were a welcome departure from the norm for the aging producer. After 11 months of planning and heated debate over where to open the picture (the studio wanted to premiere the picture in Hollywood, but DeMille vetoed the idea since his peers in tinsel town had shown themselves to be no friend of DeMille's previous works), Paramount spent a whopping \$500,000 on publicity and promotion, and mounted one of the industry's earliest and most extravagant merchandising tie-ins.

Among the companies helping to promote the flamboyant circus picture with in-store displays and promotions and magazine advertising were Jergens lotion, Libbey glass, Lalani pineapple, Lusk's candies, Revell toys, Fruit of the Loom nylons, L. W. Foster sportswear, Peter Puppet Playthings, Helbros watch, Nestle's, Esquire boot polish, Royal Crown soda, American Thread crochet, Ekotape dictation equipment—which was hawked by



DeMille himself, Pyramid children's bags, Lux soap, Chesterfield cigarettes, Lustre Creme, La Cross manicure sets, Coro jewelry, Rudin Roth socks, Animal Crackers, D. L. Waverly fabrics, Sears catalog lamp shades, and Macy's department store.

In addition, a school study guide was distributed to teachers, and *Retailing Daily* published a special supplement for the trade to promote the various retail tie-ins. Famous Music distributed music sheets highlighting the show's catalog of songs, and RCA records released an album featuring the film's soundtrack.

A hefty publicity and promotion book was distributed to theatre owners as part of Paramount's extensive marketing efforts, and exhibitors were offered, for a price, an elaborate selection of decor items, including, satin wall banners, streamers, car and truck banners, auto bumper banners, flags, marquees, ushers' badges, valance displays, pennants, aluminum twirlers, box office tent covers, and subway cards. Film strips were made available, too, and souvenir programs were supplied for sale in theatre lobbies at twenty-five cents apiece (today, the same programs can fetch up to \$50 each).

Also included in the near 100-page press book were stories, ad mats, column items, promotion ideas for local tie-ins, merchandisers, clown dress instructions, posters, stylized lettering, reviews, radio scripts, and television promos. A host of poster formats were also featured, including a 24 sheet, 3 sheet pictorial, window card, lobby photos, 6-sheet pictorial, 1-sheet pictorial, 14-inch by 36-inch insert, color photos, and a 10-1/2 inch x 16 inch herald.

The end result was a massive promotion effort from Paramount which resulted in record-breaking box office grosses. Ticket sales hit the \$20 million mark, and, initially, the circus reportedly received \$1.3 million in royalties at a time when they were badly needed by North's team. The film was re-released in 1953-54 and again in 1960. It has since been put out in stores on home video, and, presumably, the circus continues to receive payments on these sales, too. Periodically, the film shows up on late night movie shows and cable television.

In 1964, Desilu Productions (the Hollywood TV studio jointly owned by comedian Lucille Ball and her husband Desi Arnaz) starred actor Jack Palance in an ill-fated series for ABC-TV called *The Greatest Show on Earth*, which was shot, in part, at the circus' winter quarters in Venice, Florida.

On January 17, 1976, former Ringling circus performers who appeared in the film, such as Fay Alexander, Norma Fox ("La Norma"), and Gena Morowski, gath-

ered in Sarasota for a special and nostalgic 25th anniversary screening of the film of which they were so much a part. "It feels real good to see yourself," said "La Norma," one-time glamorous centering aerial attraction under John Ringling North's management. "It feels even better after some 30 years."

As recently as last year, Ringling owner-producer Kenneth Feld claimed interest in a remake of the film, although such a project seems redundant given the scope and flavor of the original. In addition, the economic feasibility of such a venture in today's world seems doubtful, since to duplicate the original would cost well over \$50 million in 1991 terms and, with the cost of marketing and film prints for theatre owners, the total price tag could easily exceed a staggering \$100 million.

DeMille called the circus "a fighting machine," and, like the circus, DeMille fought hard and long to get his circus epic to the screen. But when he did, both the tireless producer and the circus enjoyed its bountiful box office riches. As he wrote in a 1950 poem titled "The Soul of the Circus," DeMille colorfully penned, "To some it is a home, to others it is fame and excitement, and to many it is fortune."

Fortune, indeed, comes to all of us who love the circus and rejoice in the fact that DeMille's picture not only captures the fantasy of the big top but also documents, in vivid Technicolor, its last remaining days under the world's largest tented city. For *The Greatest Show on Earth* is more than just a circus movie. It is the world's most elaborate film record of a live entertainment institution and tradition now long gone from the wheatfields and the waterfronts of American life.

Special thanks to The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Cecil B. DeMille Trust, Bill McCarthy at the Circus World Museum, Bob Viol at the Sarasota Department of Historical Resources, The Ringling Museum, Fred Pfening, Jr.,

Mike Martin, John Jensen, Dorothy Lamour, and Doug Morris.

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## SEASONS GREETINGS

From the editor  
and his friend George.





## \$300 REWARD

WANTED! Anything pertaining to the Fred Buchanan Circuses of Granger, Iowa.

YANKEE ROBINSON 1906-1920  
WORLD BROS. 1923  
ROBBINS BROS. 1924-1931

I will pay \$300 to locate and use a photo of circus train parked on siding at the Granger quarters.  
All Letters answered.

Merry Christmas  
and Happy New Year

Joseph S. Rettinger  
P. O. Box 20371  
Phoenix, Ariz. 85036



PEACE ON EARTH  
GOODWILL TOWARD MEN

A traditional Christmas refrain that perhaps someday we can live by year round. Wishing all of you Joy, Good Health and Peace in 1992.

2928 East Octillo Rd.  
Queen Creek, Ariz. 85242

ROBERTS BROS.  
& RING  
CIRCUS  
Seasons Greetings



# HOLIDAY GREETINGS

and Best Wishes

Joe and Marion McKernon



# Happy Holidays



If you would like one of our 1992 Circus Calendars,  
send \$2.00 to cover postage to:

GRAPHICS 2000 • 2475 CHANDLER, SUITE 6 • LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89120





WISHES  
YOU AND YOURS

# Happy Holidays!

JIM ELLIOTT  
GENERAL MANAGER







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## "It's L. A. FOR ME IN '93"

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# CIRCUS LIFE AND ADVENTURE OF ADAM BARDY

Every so often, story books are written that tell of someone who has lived an interesting and adventurous life, and there are times that some local person may come along who has experienced such an adventure in his life's journey. Of local interest is the story of Adam Bardy, who began his "adventure" in 1915, at the age of 8, running away with the great Buffalo Bill Wild West Circus, when the Circus was playing in his home town of Webster, Mass.

This beginning adventure was of very short duration, as Adam met up with gypsy fortune tellers the very next day, and, in their generosity, they gave Adam trolley car fare money, and Adam returned home.

In Adam's teenage years, he lived with woodchoppers in shanties in the woods, and finally in a deserted farmhouse. At the age of 17, Adam joined the Ringling Bros. & Barnum & Bailey Circus. Other large and small circuses were to be Adam's life, until, in 1929, Adam met up with Kentucky Mountaineers, and the life of a bootlegger was to begin. A thrilling adventure as a big-time bootlegger was Adam's lot in life, until the Conn. State Police wiped out the operation. Adam escaped from custody, and a fugitive's existence lasting 7 long years began. During this time, Adam learned all about fortune telling, a life he followed for many years. After that 7 years, Adam gave up and turned himself in to the police. He went on to raising beautiful meat and show rabbits, and became New England's largest rabbit breeder. Then he went back to doing character readings, using palm readings and handwriting analysis by mail.

But, of all Adam's adventures, his memories of circus life were the best, including the opportunity to have had personal mends like the great Tom Mix, who joined the Sells Floto Circus when Adam was with that circus in 1929, and Adam's interest in boxing, which his good friend Tom Mix really loved.

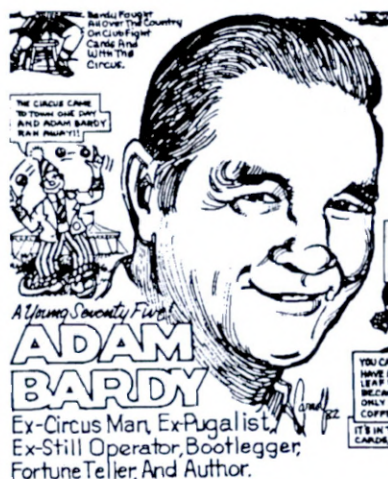
And now, as Adam lives his quiet life out in the country, he has written an interesting book that tells of his 47 years with his wonderful late wife, Ann, who was a devoted and loving mate. The story tells of what it was like to live with a fugitive and bootlegger husband all those years, and then of her passing in 1980. Adam recounts his loneliness for 3 years. Adam continues his story by telling how the palmistry reading of a young 21-year-old girl blossomed into a wonderful friendship of true love and romance, as it can come to one who has lived an adventurous, interesting life. The story explains how, through deep faith in God, Adam could live this strange, unusual and interesting life, so full of excitement, and still remain the happy-go-lucky person he still is. Adam credits all this to the guiding hand of God.

The interesting life story of Adam includes that of his close companion, 22-year-old Terry Lyn Bates. Her story alone is well worth the price of the book, as one can see that age alone is not what counts, but the way we live our lives.

The book includes many pictures that tell the life story of Adam. For an autographed copy of "Circus Life and Adventure of Adam Bardy," send check or money order for \$12.95 to:

**ADAM BARDY**

87 Alm Rd.  
Thompson, CT 06277





The commercial exhibition of wild animals in America began with the display of bears and deer and mountain lions captured by hunters and farmers and shown in rural taverns. The dancing bear, on a leash and muzzled, is an apt symbol of this phase of such shows. Exotic animals were introduced here by merchant seamen who purchased monkeys and parrots and other small types as pets in foreign ports. Larger animals were imported as infants. The first elephant brought to America was a calf that arrived in 1796. Two tiger cubs were brought from Seurat in India by a sea captain in 1806.

For larger animals to be exhibited it was necessary for a showman to exist, someone with the time and patience to see to the health and welfare of the beast. The exhibitor had to be free to go from village to village, arranging exhibitions in stables and inns. An entrance fee was charged, often as simply as passing a hat, and when the residents of an area no longer came to see the attraction, the showman moved to the next place.

A list of the first exhibits of various species would include a lion (1720); a camel (1721); polar bear (1733); leopard (1768); jaguar (1788); orang-utan (1789); buffalo (1792); catamount (1793); ostrich (1794); elephant (1796); sea lion (1796); cassowary (1800); and zebra (1805). These individual animals were all the subject of advertisements; there might have been others for which no notices were used.

Later, pairs of animals were carried about the country, two dromedaries in 1805-1809; a lion and lioness in 1816-1818; and a pair of alligators in 1821.

In chronicling the travelling menageries we have arbitrarily settled upon a definition of three animals of different species. The first such is found in 1813, though individual animals especially elephants—were displayed for many years after that time. Gradually, the number of animals in these shows increased from the original three of 1813 to over a hundred in some collections of the 1830's.

In this paper we list forty-one menageries in the years 1813-1834. It is possible we have found no advertising for another five or six, but we may have also counted one or two of them as separate

## PART ONE

# A HISTORY OF THE TRAVELING MENAGERIE IN AMERICA

BY STUART THAYER

shows that were in reality continuations of others in the list. The pluses and minuses of these contingencies would probably stabilize the picture at near to forty companies.

In 1835, the Zoological Institute absorbed all the menageries in the country—there were sixteen extant in 1834—and ended the first phase of individual management. We give a brief history of that monopoly in our final entry (42).

The Zoological Institute failed in 1837 and from then until the 1850's almost all the animal exhibits in the country were controlled by just two firms. By then, the circus and menagerie had been merged and with one or two exceptions each season the menagerie business had ceased to thrive.

The information in this paper came almost exclusively from advertising and thus is a result of newspaper survival. Some letters and diaries have been of benefit, a few handbills and posters were found, but for the most part we

learned where the men-

ageries went and what animals they offered from the newspaper advertisements.

The author is primarily a circus historian and had no intention of writing a menagerie history when he embarked on this research. The news of animal shows is what he found, not what he was seeking. For that reason, this cannot be considered a definitive work on the commercial exhibition of animals.

(1) MUSEUM OF

## LIVING ANIMALS, 1813-1815

This is the first travelling menagerie of which we have record. In July, 1813, a tiger, an African ape and a marmoset were advertised in Washington D. C. The title, which wasn't used until 1814, reflects contemporary usage, in which a collection of anything was termed a museum.

The tiger was the survivor of two that arrived in Boston in 1806. He was said to weigh four hundred pounds and had come originally from Seurat. The African ape might have been any of several types a good guess would be that it was a Barbary ape.

They journeyed west in 1814, visiting Pittsburgh, Chillicothe, Cincinnati and Louisville. If the

tiger was caged, which seems likely, the proprietor would need one wagon to carry his little show. They spoke of good music on the organ and violin, which would seem to mean that there were two or three attendants.

The menagerie was open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and at 7:30 visitors could watch as the tiger was fed ten pounds of meat. The feeding ritual became quite popular with menagerie audiences and was often mentioned in advertisements.

The caravan wintered in Philadelphia in 1815-1816. By February, 1816, a cougar and a cammot had been added. What a cammot was, we don't know.

In May, 1816, in Boston, the title of this company was changed. We continue its history under (4).

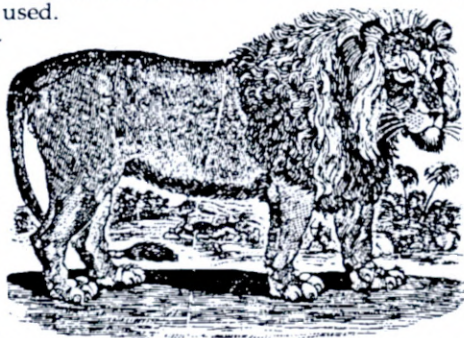
## (2) MR. BURY, 1814-1815

We have no idea who this gentleman was. He advertised a small collection of animals in Lexington, Kentucky in 1814, and in Cincinnati in 1815. The first year he listed a cassowary, a "Simia Papia," and African apes. The Simia Papia (more properly "Papio") was probably a baboon. In the second year he said he had the cassowary, a Barbary ape, and an African ape.

## (3) MENAGERIE, 1815

This caravan made its only advertised appearance, according to present knowledge, on Market Street in Baltimore in July, 1815. It is inconceivable that it did not show in other cities, but nothing has come to light.

The collection consisted of a "male cougar from Brazil," a coatimundi, a "sajou," (sapajou), a female baboon and a talapoin. The cougar was said to be the largest of the tiger kind ever brought to this country. It was three feet tall and eight feet long and we suspect it was a jaguar.





(4) GRAND, RICH AND RARE  
COLLECTION OF LIVING  
ANIMALS, 1816-1821

To call this generic name a title is stretching things a bit, yet it is all we have to work with. The name was at the head of each advertisement. The new title was first used in Boston in May, 1816. By this time the original three animals had been joined by three others, including a llama, which they later said was a guanaco. Even later, they advertised it as a guanaco or llama, indicating their confusion. It is more likely that they had the domesticated rather than the wild form. In Salem, Massachusetts, in July they revealed that the other two animals were a buffalo (*Bison bison*) and an anteater. Ten animals were exhibited in Providence, Rhode Island, in August, viz: tiger, guanaco, ape, buffalo, anteater, five monkeys.

The marmoset was not listed, but reappeared, or a replacement did, in Philadelphia in December, 1817. It is not unusual to find animals advertised in one city and not in the next. The person purchasing the ad or the printer might leave one out. Handwritten orders could be misread or misinterpreted. This sort of error persisted as long as type was hand set. Only a collection of ads from several cities can assure a true result.

The tiger died sometime in 1818; he was gone by October, when the first notices for that year are found. He had been on view in this country for twelve years, five of them with this menagerie. It would be another six years before another of his kind was advertised.

In New Haven, Connecticut, in October, 1818, a lion had replaced the tiger and the menagerie offered: lion, guanaco, African ape, Guinea lady (an ape), marmoset, two dromedaries.

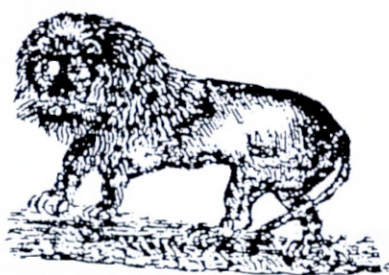
From the time of the acquisition of the two camels it is relatively easy to trace the movements of this caravan. The camels had been exhibited as a pair in Philadelphia in February, 1818, and were probably leased to the "Grand, Rich and Rare."

The African ape was trained to dance and walk the tightrope; the marmoset was able to ride the guanaco above the exhibition space. In December, 1818, a brown sapajou was added.

In Washington, D. C. in March, 1819, the exhibit was identified as belonging to a Mr. Brown. Several members of a Brown family of Westchester County, New York, were in outdoor exhibitions in the 1830's, but all of them would have been too young to be this man.

The animals were on exhibit continually through 1819, 1820 and 1821. With the exception of an ocelot added in 1820, the list remained specific, though specific replacements might have been made. Their

Most Grand, Rich, and Rare Collection of  
LIVING ANIMALS.



THE Proprietors of the grand Caravan, most respectfully inform the citizens of Boston, and the public generally, that they have erected a large and commodious building for their winter establishment, corner of Union and Hanover streets, adjacent to the Green Dragon Tavern, where they are now ready for the reception of visitors.

The Animals now in this rich collection, are, the Mammoth Lion of Asia, the largest ever in this country; the Ocelot; the Ichneumon; the Lama; two full grown Camels; Ali Baba and Morgiana, of different species; one male, the white or cream coloured of Western Tartary; the other a female of the Turkman breed, the largest known. Also, a variety of minor Animals; Ali Baba, for the gratification of spectators, will be elegantly caparisoned after the oriental style.

The exhibition is attended with music on a good Belondy Organ, the Symphonia or Ancient Jewish Symbol, with other music. Doors open from 9 A. M. until 9 P. M. Admittance 25 cents. Children under 12 years, half price. dec 23

This newspaper ad appeared in the Boston *Columbian Centinel* on December 23, 1820. Author's collection.

usual practice was to spend the winters on exhibition in larger cities and the summers travelling in the hinterlands. Most large menageries adopted this mode of business in the years to follow.

In December, 1821, the "Grand, Rich and Rare," moved into Baltimore for the winter. Here they were joined by Tippoo Sultan, one of the three elephants then in the country. When they left the city in April Tippoo Sultan accompanied them and thus this menagerie became the first one to have an elephant travel with it. Some elephants had wintered with animal shows in the past, but never had one taken to the road,

Tippoo Sultan had arrived in Boston in June, 1821, and been exhibited by himself for the six months prior to this affiliation. The title in 1822 was sometimes "Great American Caravan of Living Animals," and sometimes "Great American Menagerie," but is best known over the years as "Grand Caravan with Tippoo Sultan." We will comment on its further history under (12).

(5) WILD BEASTS, 1816-1818

In an incident during the War of 1812, the U. S. S. *Constitution* intercepted a British frigate and found in its cargo two jaguars destined as presents for the Prince

Regent. These were taken as prizes and presumably auctioned. They were exhibited in Baltimore in August, 1816, under the title "Wild Beasts." Other animals accompanied them, including a bear and an elk, "tame enough to be led around the ring." Menageries didn't erect rings this early; they happened to be exhibiting in the George Street circus building. It was with the advent of the riding monkeys in 1820 that rings were built, much as they were in the circus. The bear and the elk were quite likely the property of someone other than the menagerie proprietor as they appear again in our numbers (6) and (9).

Using the title "Brazilian Tigers," the two jaguars were exhibited by themselves in Norfolk and Charleston in early 1817. We think, without proof, that these animals belonged to John Miller of Easton, Pennsylvania, who joined Mr. Brown and Mr. Bury as our earliest identified menagerie operators.

Other individual's names come to light prior to 1817, but all of them were touring with single or paired animals. In 1802, a man by the name of Othello Pollard exhibited a leopard; in 1805, one Isaac Allen led a zebra about New England; and a lion and lioness shown in 1816-1818 were owned by Gerard Crane. Of these, only Crane is known to be connected with subsequent exhibitions.

Once again teaming up with another exhibitor, Miller was in Hartford, Connecticut, in November, 1817, where his jaguars were shown with a lion, a marmoset and the first hyena to be advertised in this country. No other hyena appeared before 1828, which leads us to suspect that this animal was misidentified.

The female jaguar died sometime prior to March, 1818, when the collection appeared in Cincinnati. An African ape had been added by that time and in May, in the same city, a leopard was announced. Miller advertised in Cincinnati that the jaguar preferred human flesh to any other kind, but assured the public that he was secured in a large iron cage. We follow Miller's further career under number (10).

(6) GRAND EXHIBITION  
OF LIVING ANIMALS, 1817-1818

Odell describes a menagerie as being at Fly Market and Water Street in New York in 1817.<sup>1</sup> It consisted of: Greenland bear, ostrich, mountain goat, elk, eagle, alligator, red lion, pelican.

We suspect that the bear and the elk were also part of our number (6). In Philadelphia, in January, 1818, the lion, the pelican and the ostrich were on display with a crown bird and a marmoset. The other animals were not mentioned. This suggests that the New York exhibition



was the combination of travelling groups, a common occurrence and one that is most confusing to the researcher. In this particular instance, we assume that the Greenland bear was a polar bear. It was the last one seen here until 1823. This menagerie was in Pennsylvania in 1818 and then disappeared, at least as a group.

#### (7) NATURAL CURIOSITY, 1818

This concern consisted of a male and female dromedary, an alligator and a marmoset. The male camel was eight-feet tall and fourteen-feet long and of a white color. The female was mouse colored, about a year old and four to five-feet high with wool eight inches long on her hump. They appeared in Philadelphia and Hartford and a week later, in New Haven, became part of the caravan we described under (4). The alligator is not found after the Hartford stand.

#### (8) ELEPHANT COLUMBUS, 1819-1823

The fourth elephant to reach America, Columbus was landed in Boston in December, 1817. He was exhibited as a single attraction until November, 1818, when he was in Cincinnati with a jaguar and a dromedary. The latter might have been one of the pair we mentioned in (7), since the number of camels in the country remained constant at four until 1828. The dromedary went elsewhere after March, 1820, and Columbus and the jaguar toured as a team for the next few years. It was the usual custom to combine these two specimens with other collections in the winter. In February, 1823, as an example, they were in Philadelphia with a llama and other animals. At this stand the advertisements said that the breath of the llama would cure whooping cough in children. One suspects that any child held up to the breath of a llama would forget any other ills. The jaguar was identified as a South American panther at this same stand. It was the last time it and Columbus were shown together. The great elephant went on as a single exhibit.

#### (9) GRAND CARAVAN OF LIVING ANIMALS, 1820-1823

The menagerie that used this generic name more than any other company is first found in Baltimore in February, 1820. Visitors were promised: lion, llama, elk, camel, bear, monkeys.

The management had a cage constructed for the lion that measured eighteen by twelve by twelve-feet high and weighed 4,000 pounds. This had to be a permanent construction as a weight of that order could hardly be carried over the roads of the day. The elk and the bear are possibly the same ones we reported under (5) and (6). The career of this bear nearly came to an end in Baltimore. On



#### GRAND CARAVAN

**R**ETURNED, with great additions, to their winter quarters, opposite the capitol. The proprietors of the Grand Caravan, take the pleasure of informing their friends, and the citizens of Albany generally, that they have returned to their old winter establishment. The building has been very considerably enlarged—a ring, or circus, has been made in the center of the building, for the exercises of the different animals—places have also been erected for the greater convenience of the visitors, from which they can have at once a full view of the various performances. The animals contained in the grand caravan as follows:

No. 1. Tippoo Sultan the great hunting Elephant of India, some of the performances of this superior animal are different from those of any ever in this country, among other feats he will take his keeper on his tusks and toss him about in a playful manner, at the height of 15 or 18 feet, his weight is about 6000, and is supposed to be the largest now in the U. States; No. 2, the Mammoth Lion; No. 3 Pacos, (a species of the Lama); No. 4, the Ichneumon; No. 5, the Camel; No. 6, Dandy Jack, the Simia Equestrian, who has excited the wonder and astonishment, as well as drawn from the audiences at the circus in New-York, for several nights, the most unbounded applause, with his unexampled feats of horse-monkeyship, is now furnished with a superb Shetland Pony, for the display of his unrivaled abilities; he will, with his usual grace and alacrity, at the word of command, walk erect up to his horse, mount, unfurl his banners, run at full speed with his flag flying, dismount, and then divert his ever numerous spectators with many other pleasing feats; No. 7, Little Jack, with other inferior animals. Excellent music in attendance.

Admittance 25 cents—children under 12 years old half price. Doors open from 8 A. M. until 9 P. M.

N. B. The proprietors have spared no trouble or expense to render this a superior establishment to any in this country for the Exhibition of Animals.—Visitors will find the caravan attended with intelligent obliging persons—every care will be taken to render the place as agreeable as possible.

Albany, Oct. 1822.

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Grand Caravan newspaper ad from the Albany, New York *Argus* of November 1, 1822. Author's collection.

April 20, the proprietor advertised that the public might come and watch as the lion ate the bear. However, so many objections were voiced that a notice on April 21 announced that the spectacle would not take place. In any event, the bear, which must have been in bad shape, and the elk did not accompany the collection into New England.

In July, in addition to the others, they advertised an ocelot, an ichneumon, a baboon and a "Dandy Jack." This last was a pony-riding monkey that, with whatever music was available, provided some entertainment other than that derived from looking at the animals. Dandy Jack, like Grand Caravan, became a generic term,

following the success of this first one of the type. The name was applied to hundreds of monkeys over the years. They were before the public at least two decades. The name was derived from Dandy Jack Dowling, hero of tales spun by the Maine humorist Seba Smith. Jack Dowling, a Yankee peddler, had a solution for every problem and a story to reinforce each of his prejudices. Variations on the name, as applied to riding monkeys, included Sailor Jack, Saucy Jack, Colonel Pluck and Lady Jane. In most small menageries the Dandy Jack was the only performer.

Additions to the Grand Caravan in 1821 included an anteater, an opossum and a "maygot." The latter was a misspelling of magot (*Macacus inuus*), the Barbary ape. A cougar was in the ads in 1822. No trace of the company has been found after 1823.

#### (10) JOHN MILLER, 1821-1825

While we are not sure of Miller's involvement with the caravan mentioned in item (4), he is definitely identified in the earliest record we have of the sale of a menagerie. A bill of sale reproduced in Scharf's history of Westchester County, New York, shows that on February 14, 1821, Miller sold what he called the "Exhibition of Animals." This was accomplished in Virginia and the buyers were Thaddeus and Gerard Crane of Westchester. They paid Miller \$3,500. for a Brazilian tiger and tigress (again, jaguars), an African leopard and "leopard-ess," a coatimundi, two English organs, a bass drum, an Italian cymbal, two wagons, five horses and harness, and all the signs, cuts and "apparatus."

This was not the end of Miller's career. In 1822, he was on the road with what Hugh Lindsay termed a menagerie, though it also had arena acts. The concern was open in the daytime for those wishing to see the animals. At night, Lindsay, Dan Minnich and William Farrell entertained at rope-walking and clowning.

Lindsey refers only to two camels, the care of which fell to him. He relates in his memoir several exciting incidents as he led the creatures cross-country at night.<sup>2</sup> The show was exhibited in Market Street in Philadelphia over the winter of 1823-1824, at the Pennsylvania Museum operated by Jesse Sharpless.

This winter entertainment must have been the combination of at least two menageries. Advertised animals were: elephant Columbus, red African lion, two camels, two llamas, snakes, wild hog, orang-utan, polar bear, monkeys, two-legged hog.

There were twenty-six specimens in all. The polar bear and the orang-utan must have belonged to other persons. Though



we have not listed an orang-utan prior to this, they were not uncommon in America. They were more likely to be exhibited as single attractions than with collections.

Lindsay did not rejoin Miller until the fall of 1824, thus we have no record of the bulk of that season. In the spring of 1825, Miller sold his animals to a Mr. Crosby (see 20) and organized a conventional circus troupe. This time, according to Lindsay, the menagerie brought \$4,000. Miller, born in 1786, died in Easton, Pennsylvania in August, 1830.

#### (11) EXHIBITION OF NATURAL CURIOSITIES, 1821-1828

The earliest advertisement we have found for this company is in Frederick, Maryland, in 1821. They had a buffalo, an elk, a lion and a calf with six legs. They were in Philadelphia a month later and had, as a guest, Hachaliah Bailey's elephant, Betty, usually referred to as "Little Bet," to distinguish her from his first elephant, which had the same name and is now known as "Old Bet." Later in that season a catamount, a mococo (properly macaque) and a marmoset appeared in the ads.

We find them in New England in the fall of 1822, and by this time their consist was: Asian lion, catamount, wildcat, ichneumon, six-legged heiffer, monkeys, llama, male buffalo, female buffalo, elk, Dandy Jack, marmoset, a total of twenty-six animals, including a "cammose" which they said came from China. This may be the same animal we listed in (1).

Animals added in 1823 included a jackal, a leopard, a baboon and three young lions. In mid-season they claimed an African ounce, which seems unlikely, and a black wolf. They were advertising thirty-six animals by late season, which, if true, made this the largest menagerie then travelling. The titles had changed as well, becoming "Grand Caravan of Living Animals."

In 1825, in Providence, Rhode Island, Zebedee Macomber applied for the license from the city and for the first time we can link that pioneer showman to an exhibition. He was active until at least 1839 and was part of the group that imported more exotic animals than any other. Macomber himself made at least two trips to Africa for shiploads of animals, returning with fifty to seventy specimens each time.

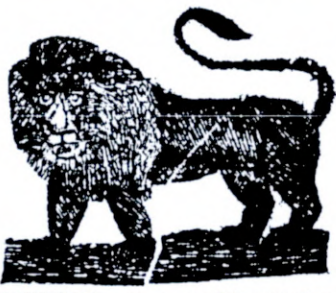
The jackal that the firm acquired in 1823, the first to be shown in this country, was termed "the lion's provider." Later menageries also used this description. Curiously, the knowledge that lions lived on kills made by jackals was lost somewhere along the line and has been trumpeted as a great discovery by some twentieth-century zoologists.

In 1827, this caravan had a polar bear (advertised as a white bear), a rare animal at that time, only two having preceded it to this country. Their 1828 lineup was: South American tiger, two gray wolves, rib nosed baboon, dogfaced baboon, barbary ape, polar bear, african lion, catamount, leopard, ichneumon, black wolf, lioness, jaguar, camel, catamount, jackal, llama and three riding monkeys, Dandy Jack, Captain Bill and Sailor.

The reader will notice that a South American tiger, catamount and jaguar are all listed. There appears to have been confusion about the correct nomenclature for Western Hemisphere members of the family *Felidae*. Pumas, panthers, catamounts, tigers, spotted tigers and the same names preceded by both North and

Grand Caravan newspaper ad used on October 25, 1823 in Albany, New York. Pfening Archives.

### GRAND CARAVAN



**RETURNED**, with great additions to their winter quarters, opposite the Capitol. The proprietor of the Grand Caravan, has the pleasure of informing his friends and the citizens of Albany generally, that he has returned to his old winter establishment. The building has been very considerably enlarged—a ring, or circus, has been made in the centre of the building, for the exercises of the animals—places have also been erected for the greater convenience of the visitors, from which they have at once a full view of the various performances. The animals contained in the Grand Caravan, are as follows:

No. 1, Tippoos Sultan, the great hunting Elephant of India. Some of the performances of this superior animal are different from those of any in this country. Among other feats he will take his keeper on his tusks and toss him about in a playful manner, at the height of 16 or 18 feet; his weight is about 6,000, and is supposed to be the largest now in the United States; No. 2, the Mammoth Lion; No. 3, Pacos, (a species of the Lion.)

**No. 4, Hippopotamus,**  
or Tapir of South America. This extraordinary animal, (the like of which was never before exhibited in this country,) inhabits the woods and rivers of the eastern side of South America and Asia. No. 5, Dandy Jack, the Simia Equestris, who has excited the wonder and astonishment, as well as drawn from the audiences at the circus in New-York, for several nights, the most unbounded applause, with his unexampled feats of horsemanship, is now furnished with a superb Shetland Poney, for the display of his unrivalled abilities; he will, with his usual grace and alacrity, at the word of command, walk erect up to his horse, mount, unfurl his banners, run at full speed with his flag flying, dismount, and then divert his ever numerous spectators with many other pleasing feats. No. 6, the ribbed nosed Baboon, one of the largest of the monkey species, with other inferior animals. Excellent music in attendance.

Admittance 25 cents, children under 12 years old half price. Doors open from 8 A. M. until 9 P. M.

N. B.—The proprietor has spared no trouble or expense to render this a superior establishment to any in this country for the Exhibition of Animals. Visitors will find the Caravan attended with intelligent obliging persons—every care will be taken to render the place as agreeable as possible.

Albany, October 25, 1823. 234

South American are rampant in advertising. That some of these were jaguars cannot easily be discounted, except then the appellation North American is attached. At this distance it is doubtful that the confusion can be amended.

In 1829, this menagerie was retitled "Macomber & Co.," and we continue its history under (22).

#### (12) GRAND CARAVAN WITH TIPPOO SULTAN, 1822-1834

The nucleus of the "Grand, Rich and Rare," collection of 1821 had been two camels, a lion, a Barbary ape and an ant-eater. Tippoos Sultan was added in 1822 and, as we said, this then became the first travelling menagerie to include an elephant. In addition, it became the only caravan that included in its title the name of one of the exhibits.

In late October, 1822, the group went into a building opposite the capitol in Albany, New York. They were to occupy this same place for two consecutive winters. When they returned to the building after the road season of 1823, they had with them a tapir from South America. It was the first such creature to be advertised in America and belonged to a Mr. Hofmaster. He had exhibited it as a single attraction that summer and said it was a hippopotamus.

On February 27, 1824, the Grand Caravan joined with J. W. Bancker's Circus for a combined exhibition. The public could visit both shows for the price of one admission. Never before had there been such an arrangement between a menagerie and a circus. This lasted until the animals went on tour in April, 1824. It was also during this winter that the name of John Martin, Tippoos Sultan's keeper, was first mentioned in the bills.

The concern, anchored by the elephant, existed until 1834, the longest of any we have found—using 1813 as its naissance. In the ten seasons after the elephant was acquired we find only two references to the proprietors. In 1826, a license was taken out by Martin, Finch & Co, in Rochester, New York. This would be Joseph Martin, the keeper, and Edward Finch (1796-1849), the man who exhibited Hachaliah Bailey's elephant from 1820 to 1823. A firm named Hopkins & Co, were the proprietors of the Tippoos Sultan caravan for three seasons in the early 1830's. We do not believe any of these people owned the elephant.

By December, 1824, Joseph Martin had trained Tippoos to perform in the ring. The keeper would stand on the beast's tusks and be tossed by a movement of the animal's head ten or twelve feet in the air to alight again on the tusks. Then, tossed again, Martin would perform a somersault and land on the elephant's back.



In 1825, this show advertised a lynx by that name. Our number (15) had listed a luserve, or North American wildcat, in 1824, which may have been a lynx. A ribbon-nosed baboon, or mandrill, also travelled with them in that year. In 1826, the ads said they had an Egyptian weazel [sic]--most likely an ichneumon, but possibly a mongoose--and a tiger cat. Without a standard for identifying these animals, the proprietor could call them whatever he wished.

In Baltimore in December, 1829, they had: Tippoo Sultan, leopard, rompo of Africa, South American tiger, South American cougar, lion, jaguar, tiger cat, tiger, adjutant, Belaric crane, lynx.

The rompo of Africa was said to resemble the hyena, which may indicate that it was a Cape hunting dog (*Lycan pictus*). In addition to the above animals, J. B. Green's collection exhibited with them in Baltimore. This had a zebra, a crane, a kangaroo and a gnu (see 21).

In 1832, they claimed fifty animals, but thirty-five of them might have been monkeys. In January, 1834, the caravan was offered for sale in Philadelphia. The ad was signed by Bailey Howe, which may indicate that Epenetus Howe, his brother, owned the company. Epenetus was very active in animal procuring and leasing animals in the 1830's. Offered were: Tippoo Sultan, camel, bear, macaw, South American tiger, three panthers (male, female and "whelp"), lioness, llama, wolf, ichneumon, leopard, zebu, badger, six monkeys.

Other goods were twenty wax figures, seventeen horses, one pony, eight wagons, harness, cages, canvas and other fixtures for traveling as well as three horses trained for equestrian performances. We do not know why the horses were included, perhaps they were not part of the menagerie. The fact that cages and wagons were listed separately would indicate that wheeled cages were not yet in use.

Hopkins & Co had the Tippoo Sultan show in 1832, 1833 and 1834. We do not think Hopkins owned the animals. Whatever the outcome of the sale in early 1834, Hopkins & Co, took Tippoo Sultan, another elephant and a few smaller types to the Maritime Provinces.

Their ads listed: Tippoo Sultan, cheetah, female leopard, South American tiger, North American bear, female elephant, capibara, wildcat, two hyenas, male leopard, raccoon and a cosmorama. This is obviously not the menagerie in the sale announcement.

When the Zoological Institute was organized in 1835 it combined all the menageries in the country; the Tippoo Sultan caravan was included.

#### (13) MENAGERIE, 1822-1823

Subtitled "A Collection of Strange Animals," this group was in Norfolk, Virginia, in February, 1822. It consisted of an African lion, two young female lions (four months old) and two jaguars or "Brazilian tigers."

In December, 1823 they were in New York City. At this stand they had the lion, the "jaggers," a dwarf bull, male and female elk and an American eagle. It is possible that this lion, advertised as "the largest that was ever in this country," was the one shown in 1824 as "Hector" (15).

#### (14) EDWARD FINCH, 1823-1831

We previously mentioned Finch in connection with the Tippoo Sultan caravan in 1826 (12). However, his career as an exhibitor began several years before that. In 1816, the Newburyport *Herald* announced the arrival in that Massachusetts town of a "living African lion." It was said to be the survivor of a pair of lions on the English brig *William* which were destined as a present for the Prince Regent. The brig was captured by the Letter-of-marque *Decatur* on 12 December 1814. The lion was auctioned in North Carolina and was bought by one George Reid, supposedly for \$1,720. Reid in turn sold the animal for \$7,000.

Finch, in 1819 was exhibiting a caged African lion in Ohio and it would appear that it was the animal from the *William*. In 1820, Finch travelled with the lion and Hachaliah Bailey's elephant Betty, the second of the named. Benjamin Brown, an old showman, said in an 1879 interview that "Hachaliah Bailey and Ed Finch had an elephant and lion, which they used to show through the country." Brown's brother, Christopher, was in charge of the exhibition. The combination was on tour at least through 1822.

In 1823, using the title "Natural Curiosities," Finch, or so we believe, led a caravan through Ohio that had a lion, a leopard, a catamount, an ichneumon, a Dandy Jack and lesser types.

No advertisements have been found for this collection from 1823 to 1828. The possibility exists that Finch leased them to others, but if so, not as a group. Finch was a partner of Joseph Martin in 1826 (12), but it isn't known how active he was. In 1828, he appeared as proprietor of a

"Grand Caravan," which toured with: African lion, jaguar, Missouri bear, African lioness, two panthers, monkeys, ichneumon, leopard, monkeys and Dandy Jack.

The ownership of this company was identified in 1829 as Finch & Mead. They added a baboon, an ape and an anteater. The Dandy Jack act was reinforced by Colonel Pluck and Lady Jane.

Abraham Mead had been operating a circus prior to this menagerie involvement. He sold out in early 1829 and went in with Finch. This is in reverse of the usual order, in which menagerie men moved to the circus, but not ordinarily vice versa.

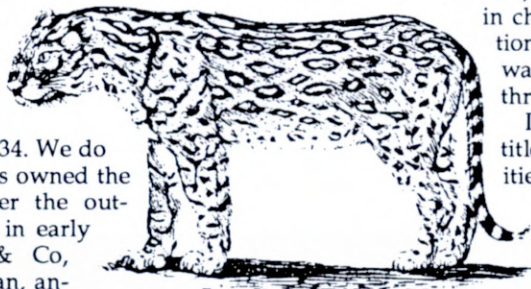
In the Brown family correspondence there is a letter that states that a menagerie owned by Phillips and Finch and managed by Mead left Putnam County, New York, late in 1829, bound for Raleigh, North Carolina. Phillips was apparently a silent partner, as we find him nowhere else in our research. Finch, Miller & Co., on the other hand, were in Norfolk, Virginia in January, 1830. The animals they exhibited were the same as those listed above. John Miller was the agent and partner; this is not the same man as in (10).

Three months after the Norfolk date, the caravan had reached Halifax, North Carolina, and here two North American panthers were in the ads, in addition to two South American ones that had been with the show for some time. These newcomers were said to have been captured in Kentucky in 1825. Other additions, in Savannah, in December, were two ostriches.

In Greenville, South Carolina, John Miller put a notice in the newspaper that a thirty-pound hog would be put into the lion's cage; whether dead or alive wasn't mentioned. However, this couldn't have been a customary practice or it wouldn't have been advertised.

Finch, Miller & Co. made another tour of the South in 1831. They ended that season in New Orleans in January, 1832. J. Purdy Brown, a leading circus proprietor of the day, either bought or leased these animals and attached them to his circus for 1832. By doing so he became one of the first proprietors in America to have an attached menagerie. It must not have been rewarding, however, as he did this but one year. Brown traveled by steamboat on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and we surmise that it was awkward to load and unload the animals at each stop. The collection went to Bailey, Brown & Co. for 1833 (see 34). As for Finch's career, we take it up again under (23).

#### (15) GRAND CARAVAN OF LIVING ANIMALS (II), 1824-1825





This relatively large collection used this title in only two seasons, but may have operated under other names at other times. The earliest advertisement found is in Schenectady, New York, in July, 1824. The show featured Hector the lion, imported from the Tower of London "two years ago." He must surely have been on exhibition in 1822 or 1823. With him were: camel, jaguar, leopard, Missouri bear, cavies, catamount, jackal, ichneumon, golden eagle, Saucy Jack, Dandy Jack, luserve.

The luserve was described as a wildcat of North America; it was probably a lynx. The list here is thirteen animals, but their ads touted twenty-five throughout 1824, and thirty-six in 1825. We assume the difference was made up of guinea pigs, monkeys and birds.

A sea-serpent, thirty-two feet long and fifteen-feet in circumference, had been washed up at Brown's Point, New Jersey, in July, 1822. Duly mounted, it was with this caravan, probably by lease. It may have been a giant squid. They advertised it in Providence, Rhode Island, in January, 1825, but not the following August. By then, a buffalo and a stuffed llama had been added. The llama was described thusly: "Little Sukey, stuffed llama, though dead the proprietor being positive it was the only one of its true kind ever exhibited has had it nicely fitted up."

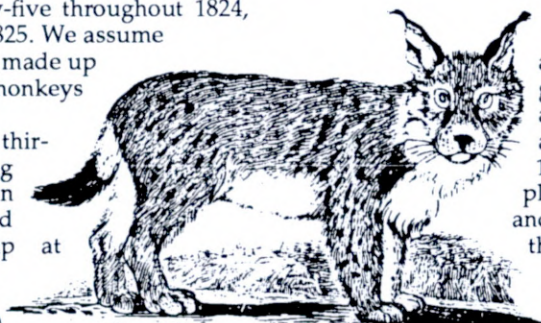
Two interesting additions to this company in 1825 were a ring tailed monkey (possibly a lemur) and a lion monkey from Brazil (perhaps a golden marmoset), neither of which had previously been advertised in this country, a ribnosed baboon, or mandril, was also part of the consist.

#### (16) BOSTON CARAVAN OF LIVING ANIMALS, 1826-1828

This small collection achieved fame beyond the ordinary, though it meant nothing at the time. It was the first menagerie to travel with a circus. Since menageries and circuses were both moving overland in wagons and performing for one or two days at a time, their combination seems to us now to be almost foregone. However, circuses of the day were often subject to censorious comment from the pulpit and the press while menageries were not. For this reason menagerie operators were behooved to keep their exhibitions separate. They were offering, or said they were, an educational experience, an opportunity to learn about the creatures of the earth. By contrast, the circus was raucous and im-

mediate and had no lasting value. "A waste of money and a waste of time," was the clergyman's general attitude toward the circus.

However, the circus was also antic, amusing and the only place one could witness scantily-clad women in a socially acceptable milieu. To paraphrase modern idiom, "When you've seen one elephant you've seen them all." The menagerie was a static exhibition, which is why the proprietors were quick to adopt such features as the Dandy Jack exhibits, large brass bands and the lion training acts.



The Boston Caravan began 1826 with a lion, a catamount, a tiger, a bear, a jackal, a baboon and a Dandy Jack. In 1827 a wolf replaced the jackal and may have been the same animal.

In Charleston, South Carolina, on February 1, 1828, the Boston Caravan joined Charles Wright's New Caravan of Living Animals (18) for a few days of combined exhibitions. The suspicion is that Wright owned both of these shows. At this same time, a circus operated by Benjamin Brown was performing in the city. Brown and Wright were alike in being residents of Somers, New York. During the month of February Wright paraded some of his animals in the circus ring. When Brown's circus moved north at the beginning of its summer season, the Boston Caravan, somewhat augmented, went with it. They appeared on the same lots in Raleigh, Lynchburg, Norfolk and Alexandria, among other places, and they advertised together. This could well have been the first instance in which a menagerie appeared in a canvas tent. The animals they presented were: lion, ribnosed baboon, Belaric crane, ichneumon, hyena, brown ostrich, lion monkey, catamount, Dandy Jack, kangaroo, leopard, marmoset, bear and for the first time, a blue monkey (*Cercopithecus mitis*).

This caravan was apparently disbanded at the end of the 1828 season; presumably it was combined with another collection.

#### (17) GRAND MENAGERIE OF LIVING ANIMALS, 1826-1829

First advertised in Baltimore on the last day of 1825, this company claimed to have thirty-six animals. We read of the following: lion, female leopard, wolf, coatimundi, camel, bear, ostrich, crown bird, male leopard, buffalo, catamount, Dandy Jack and other performing monkeys. In addition, the public was en-

tertained by one of the early bands.

In 1827, a lioness was added and she and the lion were said to be from a prize vessel, but we have not found any other reference to the event. A jaguar, a marmoset and an ichneumon were also new to this menagerie, but most interesting of all was the addition of a zebu. No previous advertisement had claimed one.

Their 1828 line-up read thusly: lion, leopard, Dandy Jack, South American cougar, lioness, gray wolf, Colonel Pluck, zebu, black bear, apes.

In the next, and apparently last, season, they said the lion was fifteen years old and that the zebu was the only one in America.

#### (18) CHARLES WRIGHT, 1826-1829

During the four seasons he operated alone, or with silent partners, Charles Wright (1792-1862) used the title "New Caravan of Living Animals." He advertised in 1826 that his collection was lately imported from the Tower of London. No earlier menagerie made such a claim. He had with him two full-grown emus ("emus" in the ads), a mammoth camel, two long tailed monkeys, a white faced monkey, a Dandy Jack and pony, and a zebra that was said to have gone from Africa to London to the United States.

From correspondence we know that Wright had two menageries on the road in 1827, but the second of these has not been identified. It traveled in Missouri and Illinois, where newspapers were not in abundance. The original show was managed by Rufus Welch, Wright's future partner.

The camel had been joined by another, so they had a male and female dromedary, the zebra, the emus, a lion and lioness, two tigers, a leopard and a pair of panthers. These were all part of the caravan in 1828 as well as a llama and a red bird of paradise.

In 1829 Wright became the first man in America to assume the role of lion trainer, or "keeper" as the contemporary phrase had it. The Asian lion and lioness which had been with him since 1827 were the subjects of ads that read, "the keeper will enter the respective cages of the lion and lioness." This was in Pensacola, Florida, late in the season and he had probably done this earlier, though no references have been found. The act itself had been accomplished in Europe as early as 1819. The reason for the delay of such a feature in this country must lie in the fact that the animal cages were small, being light enough to be lifted on and off wagons, whereas European menageries exhibited in halls where large areas could be devoted to each animal's den. This fact, if it is one, indicates that Wright's cats were



carried in wheeled cages, or large cages mounted on flatbed wagons. If so, they were the earliest such in America.

In 1830, Wright formed a partnership called "Carley, Purdy & Wright," and we deal with its history under (23).

#### (19) NATIONAL MENAGERIE, 1826-1830

This title headed the advertisements of a caravan in 1828 and 1830. In 1826, it was "Natural Curiosities," and in 1827, "Great India Elephant Caravan," and in 1829, "National Caravan." These various names indicate clearly how the titles were generic and not meant to be identification. With so few such exhibitions on tour, it made little sense to distinguish between them.

This one was originally based on a shipment of animals from London that were debarked from the ship *Xenophon* in August 1826. In addition to tigers, leopards and a llama there was a Bactrian camel aboard, the first one to arrive here. It was said to be seven feet in height.

Later evidence indicates that this group was owned by Zebedee Macomber. He reformed it in 1827, when it was called the "Great India Elephant Caravan." A female elephant, later named Flora, was the center piece of the show. She was twenty-four years old and nine feet high and newly imported. The llama, the Bactrian camel and a leopard accompanied her on tour, as well as smaller animals. Depending on advertising space, smaller animals usually meant the likes of marmosets, monkeys, ichneumons and baboons. The smaller the show the more likely such species would be named.

In 1828, a tiger, a pair of kangaroos, a pair of panthers, a jaguar and a dromedary were added. However, the list for 1829 was not as large, being: female elephant, kangaroo, coatimundi, Bactrian camel, leopard, monkeys, Captain Jack, tiger, llama, baboons.

A lion and a black wolf were additions in 1830. For 1831, the caravan became the property of June & Titus and we follow it under (27). The elephant Flora went to the Howe & Birchard menagerie (30).

#### (20) GRAND CARAVAN OF LIVING ANIMALS (III), 1827-1829

This menagerie might have been the one sold by John Miller to Mr. Crosby in 1825 (10). We have biographical information on a later menagerie operator, Stephen Butler, which says that he joined a firm operated by Eben and Horace Crosby in 1827. Further, advertisements for this company refer to their male jaguar as being the one captured by the U. S. S. *Constitution* during the War of 1812. This was Miller's jaguar.

Their small collection contained an African lion that had been "whelped" in

Nashville, as well as male and female jaguars, a Missouri bear and a Dandy Jack.

For 1828 their holdings, or at least their advertising, had expanded to include the following: African lion, Brazil tigress, leopard, Lady Jane, South American cougar, Asian lion, llama, two wildcats, Arabian camel, Brazil tiger, brown bear, Captain Dick.

Their notices in 1829 stated that the llama could run seventy-five miles an hour. How they measured this was not indicated. We find no references to the Crosbys in the animal business after 1829.

#### (21) JAMES B. GREEN, 1828-1834

There is evidence that Green was in the menagerie business prior to our date of 1828. Thomas B. Nathans, an early circus performer, said he joined Green in that year and that Green had previously confined himself to the "West and South." The first notice we have of him is in Morristown, New Jersey, where he offered the exhibit of a tigress, a female kangaroo, a zebra, a crowned heron and the first gnu to be shown in the country.

These same animals were in Baltimore in December, 1829, appearing with the "National Menagerie," which was the title of the Tippoos Sultan caravan at that time (12). Green participated in this union at least until March, 1830, then headed for Ohio.

In 1831 Green joined other menagerie proprietors in the practice of using their own names on their property, his style becoming "J. B. Green & Co." In that year his collection consisted of: male zebra, male kangaroo, cheetah, Captain Dick, gnu, female kangaroo, European badger, Dandy Jack, Panther, jaguar, llama to which he added, in September, 1831, Helen MacGregor, a female Indian elephant. Her name may have come from Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy*, but more likely was derived from the steamboat of the same name, which was the largest then on the Mississippi.

Green combined his menagerie with that of Oscar Brown (31) and some circus performers from J. Purdy Brown to form Green & Brown's Menagerie and Circus in 1832. This was one of two such combinations that appeared in that year; they were the first of the type in the world. Green's 1831 collection was unchanged for the 1832 show. Brown brought five African lions (more than had been exhibited by one menagerie theretofore) and two leopards to the partnership.

The presence of Helen MacGregor also made this the first circus to claim an elephant. In September, 1832, she somehow injured her shoulder to the extent that she laid down and refused to rise. She was dead in a matter of a few days.

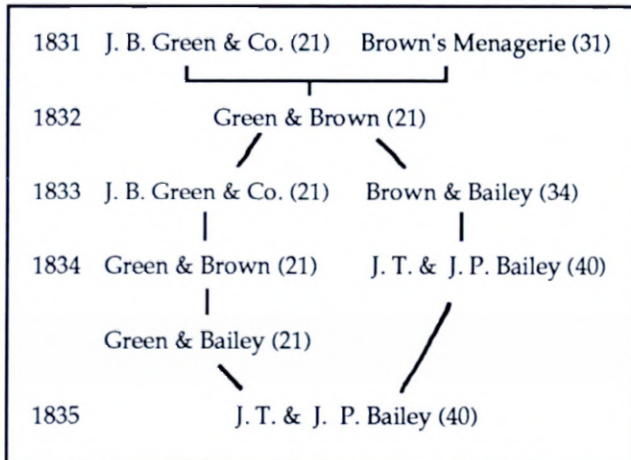
Green procured a replacement elephant, Runjet Singh, a male imported in 1832. He also lost his partner to other interests, and in 1833 advertised as "J. B. Green & Co. Menagerie and Circus." It was in this season that he hired Burt Clark as keeper of the lions. Clark daily entered the den of two lionesses and put them through various tricks.

Oscar Brown returned to the partnership for a while in 1834. They called themselves Green & Brown's Menagerie and Circus. Then, J. Purdy Brown, Oscar's brother, died unexpectedly (he was thirty-four) in Mobile that June and Oscar Brown had to take over the circus. His place with Green was taken by Lewis Bailey, or one of his sons. The show then became Green & Bailey's Mammoth Menagerie, though the circus was still attached.

In the fall, Green took custody of two hyenas, one striped (*Hyaena hyaena*) and one spotted (*Crocota crocuta*). Prior to this there had been no distinction made between examples of this family; all of them had been labelled simply "hyena." In December, a polar bear was obtained, a rare creature at that time.

Green disbanded the menagerie at the end of the 1834 season. Some of the animals, the circus performers and Green himself then joined J. T. & J. P. Bailey & Co. (40).

Because the Greens and Browns and Baileys were so intermingled in the period 1831 to 1835, we attach here a diagram of their affiliations:



#### (22) MACOMBER & CO., 1829-1834

Zebedee Macomber, whom we first mentioned in (11), was one of the leading menagerie impresarios of the nineteenth century. He not only operated animal



shows, but was involved in importing directly from Africa, and went there himself on at least two occasions to bring back large groups of animals and birds.

His 1829 caravan, the first to be titled with his own name, exhibited the following: elephant, African lion, female leopard and three cubs, polar bear, jaguar, tiger, hyena to which he added the New England Caravan, en route, a menagerie we have no record.

This increased his collection by: mammoth lion, black wolf, tiger cub, African lioness, catamount, baboon.

The elephant was an eighteen-month old calf which was later given the name Timour. It apparently belonged to Jesse Kelley and was leased to Macomber. The tiger had landed aboard the ship *Columbus* on June 7, 1829, from London. The female leopard may have been on the show for six years; she foaled on May 19, 1829.

An editorial comment in the *Boston Galaxy* complimented the management of the caravan and gives us a picture of what some menageries were like. "Much the best we have seen here . . . no commonplace animals crowded in to make up a number, and no dirty ones poking their noses out from every corner--and the whole collection is not, as some have been, a mere wilderness of monkeys."

In 1830, the title was changed to Macomber & Howe, when Epenetus Howe joined the firm, but it was back to Macomber & Co. by May. In October,



MACOMBER & CO'S.  
ENTIRE NEW COLLECTION OF  
ANIMALS,

CONSISTING of all the principal Animals in America.—recently imported from Exeter Change, London, will be exhibited at Merrill's Portland Hotel,—formerly kept by Mr. Patten;—on SATURDAY, JULY 4TH, for a few days only. The collection are as follows:—

The Young Elephant, 18 months old only, but 4 feet 6 inches high; the smallness and docility of this little elephant renders it the greatest curiosity ever offered for exhibition in America. The Great Polar or White Bear, the only one in America, weighing between 6 and 700 pounds.—The full grown African Lion, from his full flowing mane and superior carriage, is considered the finest of his species in America.—The Royal Tiger, imported on the ship *Columbus*, the 7th inst. from London.—Just added, a beautiful Female Leopard, with her three young, which were whelped May 19th, 1829; a curiosity never before exhibited in America.—The Jaguar is a beautiful spotted animal and has often been mistaken by naturalists for the tiger. The Hyena is one of the most fierce and blood-thirsty animals that inhabits the forest.—Also, will be added the principal animals in the New England Caravan—viz: the Mammoth Lion, which the proprietors bid defiance to the world to produce his equal under a forfeiture of \$1000.

African Lioness.—Young African Tiger.—Panther or Catamount.—black Wolf,—celebrated Dandy Jack, and Poney—together with a large collection of different animals.

This Macomber & Co. newspaper ad appeared in the Portland, Maine *Eastern Argus* in 1829. Author's Pfening Archives.

either Ezra or Harvey Birchard, or both, invested in the company and it became Macomber & Birchard. They said they had thirty animals. The only listing we have found has these: elephant Timour, ichneumon, Dandy Jack, polar bear, baboon, minor animals, tiger, kinkajou.

The kinkajou may be the first one in an American menagerie. The polar bear was said to have been recently imported from the Exeter Exchange in London, yet it must be the one they had in 1829.

They claimed thirty animals in 1831 as well, but advertised an expanded list. Perhaps this group should be taken as representing both seasons: elephant Flora, ichneumon, African leopard, two leopard cubs, polar bear, African lion, hyena, tiger, jaguar, Dandy Jack.

The partnership was dissolved in March, 1832, and Howe & Birchard emerged as the surviving entity (30). Macomber went to Africa in 1832, the first of his collecting expeditions (see 24).

#### Footnotes

1 George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 15 vols., New York, 1927-1949, II:486.

2 Hugh Lindsay, *History of the Life, Travels and Incidents of Col. Hugh Lindsay, the Celebrated Comedian, for a period of Thirty-Seven Years*, (Philadelphia, n.p. 1859).

# The Howes Circus Story

By Jeanne C. Howes

They were America's first master showmen before Barnum or Ringling—America's first circus family. Their adventures fill a panorama of 19th century circus history, from the earliest days of the Big Top to the halcyon days of the Howes Great London Circus.

They played from Canada to Key West, Natucket to California, and throughout England, Scotland, France and Germany. They belonged to the Zoological Institute, trained the Mabies and led them out west, fostered Dan Rice's popularity, toured the country with Barnum's curiosities while P. T. ran his museum. They brought hippodrome acts to America, braved wild jungles for exotic animals, delighted Queen Victoria and paraded with the most magnificent tableau wagons ever seen.

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The Real Christmas Feeling  
That Warm Friendly Glow  
Comes From Greeting The People  
We're So Happy To Know  
May There Come To You At This Holiday  
Season All The Precious Things of Life,  
Health, Happiness and Enduring Friendships.

**Betty and Earl Schmid**

## **HOLIDAY GREETINGS**

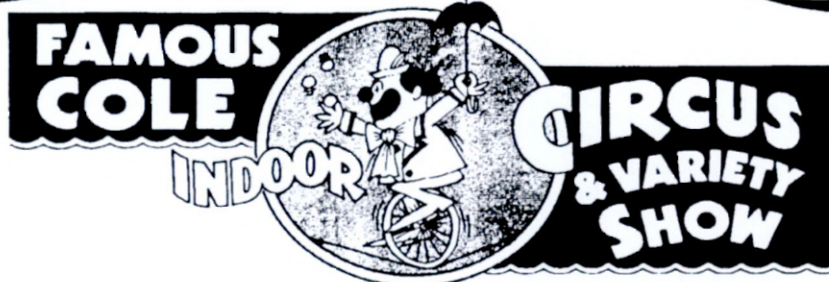
TO THE  
CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**JIM DUNWOODY**

**PRESIDENT**

**CIRCUS FANS**

**ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**



**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year  
from**

**Elida Entertainment Inc.  
Ron & Willene Bacon  
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# CHEERISTMAS GREETINGS

CHS SECRETARY-TREASURER

DALE C. HAYNES



7000 Prospect Rd.

Sarasota, FL 34243

THE LAND OF LITTLE HORSES, GETTYSBURG, PA

## HOLIDAY GREETINGS

To all our circus friends

**John and Mary Ruth Herriott**



Ed Brannan had once handled the advance for Cooper, Jackson & Co's Great New York & New England Menagerie, Museum, Circus, Caravan, Hippodrome & Bicycle Riding Association and Double Ring Shows which was based at Valley Falls in northeast Kansas. Fulford was now operating in territory where the name of Cooper was widely recognized. Nowhere in reports of the organization of the Fulford show or its demise in a myriad of legal actions, is there any basis for considering George Cooper as having an investment in the Fulford show. The following statement which appeared in the *Muscotah Record* of August 8 was nothing more than an attempt of Brannan to bolster the sale of tickets.

"The circus that will be here next Friday [August 15] is the same one that showed here seven years ago east of the park under the name of Cooper & Jackson."

A scathing review was published in the *Record* on the 22d, "Well, the great London shows, world's fair and aggregation of wonders has been and gone. It was a disappointment and not exactly what it was cracked up to be. It carried a pretty big elephant and a pretty big crowd of gamblers and that is about all you can say about it. The day was very warm but still a pleasant one and we cannot understand why a bigger crowd did not come into town and get done up. The parade was medium, the band was ordinary, the circus was fair, the menagerie was rank, the concert was rotten, the lemonade was red, the employees were gentlemanly, the gamblers were tough, the women were homely and the attendance was light. The balloon ascension did not appear. Neither did the Samoan cattle, the Tartary yak, the three headed girl, nor the hippodrome races. Accidents were not many. One of Jack Boyle's children was hurt a little and his buckboard smashed up by a runaway in the west part of town about five o'clock; Miss Birdie McCualg narrowly escaped a runaway and an injury at the show grounds in the evening; Sydney Harlow had a smashup with one of Dr. Bradley's rigs at night, and the dromedary belonging to the show displaced a shoulder while on the road from here to Horton. A shooting scrape occurred in the evening between a citizen and a gam-

## THE ONLY TRIPLE-HORNED UNICORN

Chapter 5, Part Two

**Inexhaustible in its Multinumerous  
Amplitude and Bewildering Immensity**

By Orin Copple King

Copyright © 1990 Orin Copple King

bler in which the latter had a hand mutilated and nearly lost his life. No arrests. There were no pocket pickings that we know of and nobody got drunk but the showmen. With all we had a little excitement and the town is still here."

The *Horton Commercial* and the *Horton Headlight* disagreed on the presence of gamblers and fakirs for the exhibitions of August 16.

The *Commercial* reported that, "No one

Fulford added the London name to this ad in the *Caney, Kansas Times* on May 16, 1890. Kansas State Historical Society.

ers. The whole outfit was attached after the performance in the evening for salaries and one of the men told us the manager was in the hole and getting deeper."

The *Commercial* did report the theft of two dozen chickens from Mr. Wilcox.

Fulford played Wetmore on August 18 and according to the *Nemaha County Spectator*, "The usual sharpers and gambling men were with them and they thought Wetmore an excellent place for their business as they took away several hundred dollars. One or two of the dear people came in loaded with cash expecting to break up the games, but they left with heavy hearts and empty pockets. One man was seen to lose \$110 in a very few minutes, but others kept on biting at the same game. We did not hear of anybody winning anything."

An ad in the *Holton Weekly Sentinel* for the performances of August 19, carried the title of, "COOPER, FULFORD & CO'S Great United Museum, Menagerie and Monster Circus."

Lying did not end with the title, but took an incredible twist as the *Sentinel* related on August 13.

"Cooper, Fulford & Co., who advertise to exhibit their great show here on the 19th instant, are said to be good. It is the first railroad show that has ever visited Holton. Their advance men seem to be perfect gentlemen and reflect credit upon the show."

The *Holton Sentinel* noted that the gamblers and fakirs came along with the show. "A number of verdant people were caught by them for different sums of money ranging from \$25 to \$50. It is a little bit surprising that the officers allow

### WILL EXHIBIT AT CANEY Saturday May 24, 1890! FULFORD & CO'S LONDON Shows, Museum and Menagerie!

THE ONLY  
Big :- Show!

COMING THIS YEAR.



SATURDAY, MAY 24.

REMEMBER  
The :- Date!

Limitless in its Special and Exclusive Equestrian, Gymnastic, Aerial and Zoological Attractions. European Circuses contribute their best Stars. A concentration of America's Foremost Performers, Constituting a Great Triple Arena of Imposing Feats and Features without a Parallel. All Earth's Rarest Zoological Wealth. Enormous Transportation of Wild Beasts. Monster and Elaborate Street Parade at 10 O'clock. Two Performances Daily. Remember the Date.

### Caney, Saturday May 24.

ADMISSION, 50c. CHILDREN UNDER-12, 25c



these reprobates to openly practice their cussedness upon the innocent."

The Holton *Independent Tribune* made no comment on gambling but the editor was shocked by the immoral influence of the performance.

"It is generally observed, after a circus has been in town, that the boys try to turn summer-saults, etc., but we could hardly believe it when told that some of the girls had dressed up in tights and were trying some of those wonderful feats in the back yard. Perhaps it's all right, girls, but try them in the house or go a few blocks from the square."

The *Sentinel*, the *Recorder*, the *Tribune*, three papers in a town of less than 2,000 people!

The Valley Falls *New Era* ran an ad for "Cooper, Fulford & Company," but the name of Cooper did not appear in the towns other two papers, the *Republican* or the *Register*, for the exhibitions of August 20.

The *Republican* found the "usual amount of fakirs and gamblers;" the *New Era* thought the number of fakirs was greater than usual; the *Register* saw no gamblers or fakirs, but was delighted to meet again an old friend, Ed Brannan.

The Winchester *Herald*, speaking of the exhibitions of August 21, reported that Fulford had a fair audience at the matinee but a small evening crowd. "The acting was better than we expected, and the menagerie—well there was none worth speaking of. When the clown got off the chestnut about shooing flies in a blacksmith shop, we expected to hear Tide McDermond give him the laugh, but was disappointed. We forgot all our trouble in this world when the clown sang that soul-stirring national hymn, 'Little Annie Rooney,' and when the show people joined in on the chorus—well, are nearly fell off the soft cushioned planks—our emotion was so great. The usual number of fakirs were on the grounds, and three of the crowd invested their hard-earned dollars in paper, soap and experience. A regular set of rollers and bulldozers were in charge of the reserved seats inside the tent, and the way they carried on their business was a shame and disgrace. This outfit will not meet with a very cordial reception should they come this way another year."

The only recognition for the exhibits at Oskaloosa on August 22 was one sentence in the *Independent*. "A horse belonging to John Jeffries was stolen from the circus grounds last Friday, during the evening performance of the show."

Fulford & Company arrived in Tonganoxie on Sunday morning for the exhibitions scheduled for August 25. Sunday was a day of rest for most of the show people but not for the circus gambler. The *Mirror* stated that, "A game of

THE ONLY BIG SHOW COMING THIS YEAR!

By agreement of the Showmen's Pooled League, will exhibit at

Muscotah, Friday, August 15th.

FULFORD & CO'S  
UNITED MONSTER SHOWS!

London Circus, Museum, Hippodrome and World's Menagerie.



A MENAGERIE OF WILD BEASTS!

Overwhelming Array of all Earth's Rarest Zoological Wealth.

SAMPSON!

The Monster War Elephant, Covered with Coldest Cloth of Gold and Red in African and Indian Keepers.

GREAT TRIPLE CIRCUS COMPANY.

Of Impassioned Feats and Features without Parallel.

Crowned with the Brilliant Lustre of the Morning Sun, the

GRAND GOLD GLITTERING STREET PARADE!

Reflecting scenes more grand than King or Conqueror ever looked upon. Inexhaustible in its Multitudinous Amplitude and bewildering immensity, exhibiting the most vivid imagination in conception, worth many miles of travel for one. This Mammoth Circulation never divides. It is a rare spectacle at all times and places.

2 Performances Daily! Doors Open at 1 and 7.

Performance one hour later. One admission ticket admits to all the advertised shows. Children under twelve years of age, half price. Remember the day and date.

Muscotah, August 15th.

This Fulford newspaper ad appeared in the Muscotah, Kansas *Record* on August 8, 1890. Kansas State Historical Society.

poker was in progress in one of our hotels Sunday night, and a showman roped in a fellow to the tune of \$250."

The poker game was a mere prelude to the robberies of a rain-drenched circus day, as described in the *Mirror* after the show had gone, "A Gang of Robbers.

"The circus that was here Monday, had with it the largest gang of thieves that ever struck the community. Whether they acted in conjunction with the circus management or were part or belonged to the circus, we will leave our readers to judge for themselves from the facts presented.

"The cooper who works for Phelps Bros., had gone into the tent, and wishing to buy a check for a reserved seat, he opened his pocket book having some silver therein. Some fellows tapped him on the shoulder just as he opened the book and the check man snatched a dollar. The cooper was equal to the emergency and collared the thief who immediately dropped the money. Immediately after the cooper; came a young man with two young ladies. The same thieves played, the same game, and this time secured \$10, but the young man did not kick. This game was played over and over again

that day, while the crowd was passing in, and the city marshal and constable not much over fifty feet away. In fact complaints were made to the marshal by the cooper, but he refused to do anything and did not even watch the thieves to prevent it again occurring. The fact that the officers permitted such wholesale robbery to go on without molestation, leaves room for some very unkind suggestions."

The *Mirror* noted that, "The circus was accompanied by all sorts of fake names which were permitted to run unmolested by our authorities. Those who bit have no one to blame but themselves for their loss, and it is to be hoped they have become wiser by their experience. It is a part of human nature to want to get something for nothing, and it is the sharper fellow who generally gets the something."

Lawrence was favored with two days of exhibitions on August 26 and 27. According to the *Daily Record* the show needed extra time to repair wagons, harness and other equipment worn and damaged by nearly four months on the road. Four performances were given and all were well attended.

The *Gazette* reported the presence of Madam Cordelia who was fired from the show in the middle of May. Since there is no mention of her between the firing and the Lawrence date and later, her appearance should be accepted with strong doubts. Perhaps Ed Brannan was playing games with the readers.

In a review, probably the work of Brannan the *Gazette* on the 28th reported, "Too much can not be said in praise of Messrs. Fulford & Co. for these exhibitions. Among the many features of the performance was the riding by James Stowe, Millie Stowe, Madam Cordelia and Wm. Dorr, who all received their share of applause; and the troupe of highly educated dogs performed by their trainer, Miss Jessie Dorr, was a great feature. The flying ring, by Millie Stowe was fine, and the acrobats Lavan and Varda, were extraordinary; the trapeze performance by Potter and Potter are way above the average. George DeHaven is well entitled to the name of the boneless man; Wm. Dorr is without an equal in the countyman's first visit to the circus, and his performance is well worth the price of admission.

"All in all it is the finest small show that has visited Lawrence, and for want of space we cannot give them the notice they deserve, but we will assure them a hearty welcome on their return. Success to Fulford & Co."

After the Tonganoxie date the fakirs and gamblers were remarkable for their absence. Perhaps rats do abandon a sinking ship.

Fulford & Company gave its last Kan-



sas exhibition on August 30 in Argentine. Ed Brannan handled the advance and according to the Argentine *Republic* persuaded the city council to reduce the license fee to \$15. After circus day the *Republic* made no mention of the company.

From time to time word of the Great United Shows reached the Topeka press. The Topeka *Daily Capital* on June 22, reported that the show did good business in Tipton, Missouri. "They are still 'on top' as a writer expresses it, though they have met with some reverses. Their tent, on one occasion, was torn down in a wind storm, but the trouble was soon overcome."

Abe Fulford was home for a few days in August, and the August 5 *Democrat* reported on his activities. "A. K. Fulford, who organized the great Fulford circus last spring, is in the city. He reports that his circus has met with great success, exceeding his most sanguine expectations. It has been traveling in Missouri nearly all summer and has almost without exception drawn big crowds. It has never missed a date. He has added a large number of rare and valuable animals to the menagerie, and has nearly doubled the number of horses, having now over 100 horses with the show. He intends soon to strike northern Kansas, and will show as long as the weather will permit, returning to Topeka for the winter."

Mack Lytle was home August 12. He told a *Capital* reporter that "they are doing a fine business."

A staff position on a circus in the late nineteenth century was a glamorous career paying far more than the average man could earn in a more traditional employment. The circus executive held a position equivalent to today's TV and movie executives. Tom McGrath was a good example.

He was born March 17, 1856, in Rhode Island, the child of emigrant parents. His father was born in Scotland and his mother in Ireland.

Quite possibly McGrath came to Topeka with the Sells Brothers circus. For several seasons he was a ticket seller on the Sells show and also for Barrett. McGrath married Josephine, daughter of Judge Guthrie, on December 23, 1879. Three children, two girls and one boy, were born to the couple.

Daily wage rates in Topeka for 1885, taken from the Kansas census of that year, were: Millers \$3.00 per day; Bricklayers 2.54; Masons 2.54; Painters 2.50; Carpenters 2.25; Tailors 2.25; Blacksmiths 2.00; Wagonmakers 2.00; Harnessmaker 2.00 and Clerks 50.00 per month.

The highest paid craftsmen, millers, working 60 hours per week, could earn

The Only Big Show Coming Here This Year.

✻Reduced Rates on All Railroads.✻

Will Exhibit One Day

**Holton, Kans.,  
TUESDAY, Aug. 19, 1890,**

COOPER, FULFORD & CO.'S

—GREAT UNITED—

**Museum, Menagerie and Monster Circus**



Overwhelming Array of Earth's Zoological Wealth.

**SAMSON** THE MONSTER WAR ELEPHANT, covered with the most costly cloth of gold, led by African and Indian keepers.

Huge Caravans of Camels in Charge of Arabian Asiatic Keepers.

A monstrous array of massive dens and an endless variety of gilded cages, containing all the beasts, birds and reptiles worth seeing under the sun.

**TRIPLE CIRCUS COMPANY,** of imposing bands and features without a parallel—circumvented with the railroad loops of the monster sun, the grand

**Gold, Glittering Street Parade,** featuring things more grand than king or emperor ever invited upon. Spectacular in its magnificent attire and bewilderingly immediate, exhibiting the most wild imagination in modern circus, with a million of wonders. This monstrous nonpareil never divides. It is the grandest and the only one of its kind.

Two Performances Daily.

Shows open at 1 and 7 p. m. Performance one hour later. One admission ticket admits to all the selected shows. Children under 13 years of age, half price. Remember the day and date.

**Holton, Tuesday, Aug. 19.**

Cooper was added to the title in this August 13, 1890 newspaper ad in the Holton, Kansas *Signal*. Kansas State Historical Society.

\$72 per month. Tom McGrath, circus ticket seller, received from Fulford & Co., \$150 per month, not counting "walk-aways" who left their change on the wagon counter.

The wife of a circus man had much in common with the wife of a sailor. In the back of her mind, except in the most solid of marriages, was the proverbial "girl in every port." It is unknown if Tom McGrath was a philanderer, but it would be consistent with his character. His management of the reserved seats on the Fulford show was laced with sharp practices, even thievery. A "city slicker," a "sport," preying on "rubes." It is easy to understand the anger of Josephine McGrath when her husband came to visit in August of 1889, as reported in the Topeka *State Journal* on August 14.

"Mrs. Thomas McGrath assaulted her husband last evening about 7 o'clock, in front of Clements & Chaffee's store, and struck him several times with a carriage whip. The episode attracted a great deal of attention and has been the talk of the

street to-day. Mrs. McGrath, her two children and her mother, Mrs. Judge John Guthrie, were driving in her carriage. As they passed the place named she saw her husband in company with two friends, sitting in a carriage, and, stopping her vehicle, made the attack. The remonstrance of her mother, the screams of the little children and the peculiar nature of the affair attracted a great deal of attention and a crowd gathered immediately. McGrath left the carriage and walked away.

"Mrs. McGrath drove home where the difficulty was renewed on the return of her husband a few minutes later.

"The cause of the affair is not explained by the parties. Mr. McGrath went to Kansas City last night, and it is not known when he intends returning."

On September 6, 1890 at Concordia, Missouri Tom McGrath picked up his tickets from Mack Lytle who was in the ticket wagon straightening up the mess caused by the wagon having been turned over and the contents of the drawers and pigeon-holes dumped on the floor. McGrath went out of the wagon and stopped to talk to a fellow worker. McGrath leaned against the wagon with one hand while he talked.

Lytle, inside the wagon, was in the act of moving a revolver from one hand to the other to put it in its proper place when the gun fired. The bullet went through the side of the wagon into McGrath's arm pit and continued on down through his heart. Death was nearly instantaneous. McGrath's last words were, "Oh, oh, who shot me?"

A coroners' jury convened at Concordia declared the shooting accidental and absolved Lytle of any charges.

One of the mysteries of the McGrath affair was a telegram to Willie Sells on the 6th which was reported in the Topeka *State Journal*.

"Tom McGrath was shot and killed accidentally by W. M. Lytle. Inform his family and come at once. Answer. W. R. McGuire."

Did the Sells family have an interest in the Fulford show? The only connection found so far was nine quarter poles that Willie borrowed and which he was forced to buy for \$5 when the Fulford show was auctioned. Why did they want Willie Sells on the show?

The *Journal* on September 8, carried the following: "The body of Thomas McGrath, who was accidentally shot and killed by W. M. Lytle, at Concordia, Missouri, Saturday morning, as announced in Saturday's *Journal*, arrived in Topeka on the Rock Island, at 11:25 o'clock Saturday night. The remains were accompanied by W. M. Lytle, Charles Frederick and W. R. McGuire. The body was taken to Palmer's



undertaking room, where it remained until yesterday afternoon, when the funeral took place from the residence of Hon. John Guthrie, 820 Quincy street. The services which were conducted by Rev. Dr. F. S. McCabe, were attended by a large number of friends of the deceased and the remains were taken to Topeka cemetery for interment."

Fulford & Co., continued its tour of Missouri after the shooting. The season ended at Lamar, Missouri, Saturday, October 11, and the show was back in Topeka on October 14.

The entire route of Fulford & Co's United Monster Shows, London Circus, Hippodrome & World's Menagerie may never be known. There are gaps in the Kansas dates, frequently because the probable towns did not at the time have a newspaper. On some of the Kansas dates the trail vanished into thin air leaving no trace of Tobe-Samson, not even droppings.

Winter quarters in Topeka were less than satisfactory. Much of the equipment was stored in the show tents including some of the live stock. The *Journal* on December 13 published the following: "About 11 o'clock last night one of Abe Fulford's circus tents, which are on Clay street near Fourth street, was discovered to be on fire. An alarm was sent in, but when the firemen arrived the fire had done its work. The tent was used as a stable. Besides the horses, harness and equipments, there was a large quantity of hay in the tent, and the fire spread with almost lightning rapidity. The whole tent was soon enveloped in the flames, and it was impossible to get all the horses out. One valuable animal was burned to death, and several others were badly scorched. About twenty sets of harness were destroyed by the fire.

"Three men were sleeping in the tent, but they say they were not smoking, and Fulford is unable to account for the fire. He had no insurance, and his loss will be about \$600."

Even before the season ended Abe Fulford was faced with many suits for recovery of money lent him or for merchandise bought with his personal note. Suits ranged from \$14.08 to cover a coal bill to \$1,744.80 owed against the Fulford farm. The farm was sold by the sheriff. The Bank of Topeka won a judgment against Abe and his brother Jonathon for \$1,613.25. The sheriff sold Abe's house.

Despite the claims of Fulford that the show had a successful season, there is no

indication that the aggregation returned to Topeka with any money in the wagon.

Cratty Bros. & Ashcraft, attorneys representing the Empire Show Printing Company, wrote Fulford "Company, May 8, 1891, demanding payment of \$1,434.51 for lithographs and other printing. The first order to Empire was for \$953.10 covering materials shipped to Topeka March 25, 1890. On July 15 the circus paid Empire \$300 in cash. Empire received a check from the circus in the amount of \$1,000 dated August 28, 1890. The cost of col-



lecting the check was \$1.25 which Empire added to Fulford & Co.'s indebtedness. Empire made 16 shipments to the show.

An endorsement written on the lower portion of the Cratty-Ashworth letter stated:

"We hereby acknowledge that the above statement showing a balance due from us to the Empire Show Printing Co., of \$1,434.51, is correct and will be paid by us within the season of 1891 together with interest at the rate of six per cent per annum from date of purchase to the date paid. Topeka, Kansas, May 13, 1891. A. K. Fulford, J. C. Elliott, Of the firm of Fulford & Co."

Missing is the name of William M. Lyttle. Two of the partners apparently wanted another season, but Lyttle had had enough. Dissolution of the partnership became necessary and Elliott filed suit in the Circuit Court of Shawnee County (Case 453) against Lyttle and Fulford forcing the sale of assets and distribution of the proceeds. Sheriff John Mileham was appointed receiver.

An inventory of assets, listed below, was completed July 14, 1891, and certified by Mileham.

"Wagon with small steel (unintelligible); 1 band wagon; 1 tableau wagon glass in sides No. 36; 1 lion den cage; 1 bear den cage; 1 cage No. 38, Yack

(sic); Called Yack (sic) Cage No. 38; 1 seat plank wagon No. 19; 2 advance Nos. 1 & 2; 1 bird wagon No. 22; 1 property wagon; 1 chandelier wagon; 1 monkey cage No. 13; 1 kangaroo wagon No. 21; 1 stage Coach (old); 1 jack wagon; 1 canvas wagon; 1 side show wagon; 1 Surry 3 seats (old); 1 buggy 2 seats; 1 buggy 1 seat with (unintelligible) and pole; 3 sets running gear for 2 horse wagons. Old and worn out.

"6 mules—3 span; 2 Gray horses; 2 Bay horses; 1 White horse; 2 Brown ponies; 1 Iron Gray horse; 1 Sorrel horse; 1 small mule or burrow; 2 Gray horses names Pat & Mike; 2 Gray horses names Billy & Barney; 1 Sorrel horse worthless on account of fire; 1 Gray horse Named Tip; 1 white Cockatoo bird; 2 birds blue McCalls (sic); 2 birds red McCalls (sic); 1 coon; 2 Irish monkees (sic); 1 ringtail monkey; 1 blackface monkey; 1 bear (Cinnamon); 1 snare drum; 8 boxes of show paper, posters etc.; 1 Box with a lot of odd pieces of old harness.

"1 100 foot round top canvas tent; 1 60 foot round top canvas tent with 30 foot middle piece; 1 40 foot round top canvas tent with 30 foot middle piece; 1 40 foot round top canvas tent; 1 20 foot cook tent 12 x 20; 1 48 foot horse tent with canvas mangers for same; 1 candy top size 8 x 10; 1 marquee for main entrance to show canvas for big tent; 6 side show banners; 1 block & fall with 3/4 inch rope; 1 1 inch guy rope; 5 empty wardrobe boxes-wood; 10 band uniforms (red); 2 spangled banners; 2 spangled horse blankets; 20 flags for animal cages; 45 pieces of wardrobe, part spangled and part not; 18 hair tassels, harness trappings; 3 ring banners; 1 small lot of 1/4 inch rope; 1 paste brush; 2 circus center poles; 1 paste furnace; 1 iron sledge without handle; 1 blacksmith blower all iron; 1 base drum (broken); 1 iron shovel wood handle; 21 pieces of wardrobe; 9 circus caps; 2 tin boxes with (unintelligible) tassels.

"1 candy box; 100 wooden stakes with iron bands on head; 8 saddles pads with stirrups; 1 set of 4 horse ring harness red webbing; 5 surcingles; 7 riding bridles; 23 lengths of seats consisting of jacks-strings and seat planks; 4 sets of side tent poles; 1 set of quarter poles; 1 large oil burner-known as beacon light 96 lights; 1 Star oil burner 64 lights; 3 small lights gasoline burners; 2 gasoline cans 30 gallons each; 1 gasoline can 20 gallons; 6 tin torches; 1 leaping board with (unintelligible) and jacks; 2 center poles for side show tents; 1 stake puller (brown); 1



ax; 1 lemonade tray and glasses; 2 pieces of oil cloth 2 x 14 each; 1 ice pan; 2 wooden stands; 2 pedestals for objects.

"1 basket for riding camel; 3 sets of lead bars for band wagon; 2 sets of (unintelligible) poles for band wagon; 1 five gallon earthen crock; 2 galvanized iron buckets; 40 cage banner poles; 7 short banner poles; 1 two gallon jug; 6 one gallon tin pans; 14 tin plates; 1 tin quart measure; 5 galvanized iron buckets; 1 twenty gal lemonade tin can; 1 fifteen gal lemonade tin can; 2 galvanized iron cook pans; 15 tin spoons; 6 iron table knives; 26 tin pint cups; 5 tin pepper boxes; 5 one gal tin pans; 29 Tin plates; 1 set pony harness; 4 tin pepper boxes; 17 tin table spoons; 18 iron table forks; 16 iron table knives; 1 Piece of (unintelligible) carpet.

"50 Feet of new rope one inch; 2 ladies side saddles; 70 Feet 1-inch guy rope; 1 main fall rope 1-inch with 2 blocks 90 feet; 30 feet 1/2 inch fall rope with 2 small blocks; 100 feet 1-inch rope; 8 feet one inch rope with 1 block; 4 bail (sic) rings for canvas center; 1 lot of carpet for reserved seats old about worthless; 40 Feet 1/4 inch rope; 19 pieces of circus wardrobe; 3 ring banners; 8 cage flags small; 8 circus caps colored; 44 plumes for circus horses; 1 reserved seat ropes; 1 wood pulley; 7 iron stake bands; 4 pieces of canvas cage covers; 11 wood table jacks; 20 wood seat jacks; 2 sets of seat (unintelligible) for wagons."

The inventory also acknowledged receipt of \$5.00 each from W. A. Sells for 9 quarter poles borrowed and not returned. A. K. Fulford was acknowledged for paying \$15 for harness belonging to Fulford & Co., which he sold.

Missing from the inventory are the camel and the elephant which in a manner unknown became the property of Lyttle.

In his final report of May 20, 1892 Mileham listed receipts from the auction which was held October 28, 1891. The total amount of money received from all sources was \$2,629.70. The major sums came from the sale of the horses and mules, \$1,185.00; the wagons, tents, wardrobe, etc., brought \$1,221.20.

The Empire Show Printing Company received \$1,572.42. The cost of the Elliott suit against Lyttle and Fulford in the amount of \$404.05 was paid by the receiver. Payments equaled exactly the receipts of \$2,629.70.

Elliott re-entered the retail sporting goods business and later operated movie theaters. He died in 1922 and is buried in Topeka Cemetery.

Fulford had a rough time after the collapse of the circus. He was able to get a living through excavating and road grading, but he never regained his previous



stature. Fulford never quite recovered from circus fever. The *Journal* on October 7, 1896, reported that, "Abe Fulford says that the circus business is the only kind where money is coined. He will probably start another on the road next spring." In the spring he was still talking of organizing a small circus but to no avail. Fulford's circus career ended with the auction.

On November 21, 1913 the *Journal* reported his death.

"ABEL FULFORD DEAD. Was Well Known Topeka Contractor—Laid First Topeka Paving.

"Abel Fulford, a well known Topeka contractor of former years, died today at a local hospital, where he had been for over a month. He was 66 years of age.

"Abe' Fulford played an important part in the earlier street work of Topeka. He held the contract and laid the first pavement on a Topeka street. He was recognized in politics as a leader of a certain faction. His business ventures were many, and, for many years were generally successful, although he lost everything he had made later in life. Railroad grading and street paving contracts were his principal business ventures, although he even attempted the circus business for a while. With Mack Lyttle, a Shawnee county farmer, he made up a circus in Topeka and traveled all over the United States at a time when circus travel was not on special trains with perfected equipment. His

stories of this term of circus life were highly entertaining.

"About a year ago Mr. Fulford's wife died, and since that time he had been making his home with a daughter, Mrs. C. Shadbolt, who lives east of the city. He was brought to the hospital a month ago. His death was the result of an organic trouble of several years' duration.

"The funeral will be held from Sheldahlbarger's chapel at 10 o'clock Saturday morning."

Abel Fulford is buried in Topeka Cemetery.

The collapse of the Fulford show cured Mack Lyttle of circus fever, but he was the only one of the partners who retained any property of the show—a camel, a bear and an elephant. The bear died in April of 1891, reputedly of the "grippe."

"The only elephant ever assessed in Topeka," according to the *Journal* of April 22, 1891, "had a tax levied upon him today by Major Shreve, the city assessor. The beast is the property of William Lyttle, and is kept at the rear of his shop on West Fifth street. It was formerly the chief attraction in Fulford's circus. The elephant was assessed at \$1,000."

Residents of the neighborhood were beginning to complain loudly about the stench from Tobe's quarters when the Sieber & Company show solved the problem by hiring Tobe to be the biggest elephant on earth for the season of 1891. Tobe did his best until May 16, when Sieber played Independence, Kansas. Tobe laid down and refused to get up. The show moved on but Tobe refused to move. A week later Lyttle appeared on the scene and with a derrick got the elephant on its feet and brought it back to Topeka.

Lyttle had a large fruit and cattle farm southwest of Topeka and in the fall of 1891 built a huge barn, 100 x 60 feet. The barn burned to the ground on January 21, 1892. The *Journal* carried the story.

"Mr. Lyttle kept besides his stock and grain the animals belonging to his circus. A fire was kept in the basement to keep the animals from warmer climates comfortable. The camel and elephant were kept tied near the stove.

"Yesterday morning, the elephant broke loose. He was of an inquiring disposition. It was supposed that he was playing with the fire and upset the stove. None of the help were near, and the building was all in flames before the fire was discovered.

"The camel was burned to death, and some horses and cattle in the basement of the barn suffered the same fate. The elephant was badly burned, but the assistants managed to get him out. He may live.

"The barn cost \$3,000, and is a total loss. There is no insurance. The fate of Tobe is unknown."



Mack Lyttle prospered over the years and eventually spent all of his time on the farm until he retired and moved back to Topeka in 1919. Lyttle died November 5, 1936, at his home in Topeka, 1332 Buchanan Street, of unreported causes. Burial was in Topeka Cemetery.

Concurrently with the dissolution of Fulford & Co., a suit was filed in the District Court of Shawnee County on July 27, 1891 against Mack Lyttle on behalf of the children of Tom McGrath. The case (No. 14688) was tried under a peculiar mixture of Missouri and Kansas law.

The laws of Missouri where the death of McGrath occurred were more explicit in the dollar amount of damages allowable in a case of wrongful death, allowing up to \$5,000. Under Missouri law a widow was allowed six months in which to bring suit, and forfeited her claim to compensation if she failed to file during the limited time. There was no time limit for the filing of claims by minor children and therefore suit was filed on behalf of the children of Tom McGrath, Helen, Mary and Virgil, aged 10, 8 and 6, respectively. The suit in the amount of \$5,000 was brought by the widow, Josephine McGrath, as next friend of the plaintiffs.

The evidence presented during the trial was consistent with the news accounts and the only duties of the jury was to determine the degree of negligence on the part of Lyttle and to set the amount of damages, if any.

Abel Fulford was subpoenaed to appear for the plaintiffs. Fulford's testimony as reported in the *Journal* on April 21 was that, "He did not know of any quarrel between the men, but had heard Lytle (sic) say that 'if McGrath did not do the fair thing and make settlements, he would put cold lead through him.'"

Elliott testified that, "He knew nothing about the killings and knew of no quarrel between Lytle and McGrath."

The court and the press both misspelled Lyttle's name.

The verdict delivered by the jury on April 22, was a shock and an insult to both plaintiffs and the defendant. The jury awarded the McGrath children \$100 and costs.

David Overmyer, one of the attorneys for the children, told a *Journal* reporter, "That verdict was absurd, and shows, on the face of it, that it was given to avoid a hung jury. I haven't talked with the jurors, but it stands to reason that none of them were satisfied. If they thought Lytle guilty of carelessness, and that he ought to have paid for it, why didn't they say so? If not, then there should have been a verdict for the defendant. My motion for a new trial will be argued about the close of the term. If we win then, we will try the case over at the next term."

Lyttle's attorney, Z. T. Hazen, quoted in the same *Journal* story believed that "his client should have been released from obligation entirely. I understand that the verdict was a compromise. Two wanted to give the plaintiff all she asked, \$5,000. Two were for nominal damages, just to throw the costs on the defendant, and eight were for a straight verdict for the defendant. I think they must have felt that they would hardly like to compel Mrs. McGrath to pay the costs herself and concluded to relieve her of that expense; by giving a verdict in her favor, no matter how small, they throw the costs on to Lyttle."

On July 21, 1892 the verdict was set aside and a new trial ordered for the next session of the circuit court.

McGrath v. Lyttle came to trial for the second time on February 13, 1894. The trial was quick and on the 15th the jury awarded the McGrath children \$3,000.

Allen Sells and Willie Sells were both subpoenaed but were never called to testify. No explanation of their involvement in the affair can be found.

After the second trial one of the jurors, R. D. Dolman, was heard to remark to an acquaintance that, "Mrs. McGrath is an old school mate of mine and we have been friends for a long time and I would not go back on her in a time like this."

Another juror, Mr. Peyton, remarked, "Well, the other jury that tried this case returned a verdict against Lyttle and we certainly had as good a right to return a verdict against him as they had."

The verdict against Lyttle was thrown out on the basis of the above remarks.

A third trial began in the district court on March 23, 1895. Lyttle was acquitted. By this time Josephine Guthrie McGrath had become Mrs. W. H. Culp.



William McClintock "Mack" Lyttle, partner in the Fulford & Co. Circus. He was born on March 9, 1855 and died on November 5, 1936. Author's collection.

A motion for a new trial was filed on behalf of the McGrath children, but was denied by the court on March 28, 1896.

The circus adventure of Mack Lyttle was finally at an end, but what had it cost him?

Lyttle was survived by four children and ten grandchildren. When asked if she thought Lyttle could have intentionally killed Tom McGrath, one of his granddaughters expressed the belief that he was capable of murder, although he treated his family with nothing but love and kindness. For family reasons the granddaughter wishes to remain anonymous.

*Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video, Topeka, Kansas.*

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